

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND EXECUTIVE COACHING

**The Impact of Leadership Development and Executive Coaching on
Administrator Retention**

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Dedication

This dissertation is lovingly dedicated to my mother, my first teacher, whose remarkable 40-year career in education touched the lives of countless students and inspired in me a lifelong passion for learning, service, and leadership. Her unwavering belief in the transformative power of education has been a guiding light throughout my life. I also dedicate this work to my father, whose quiet strength, integrity, and example taught far more people than he ever realized. Through the way he lived his life, he demonstrated that true leadership is measured not by titles but by the lasting impact we have on others.

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Abstract

School administrator turnover disrupts instructional continuity, organizational stability, and long-term school improvement. Although leadership coaching and professional learning are increasingly used to support educational leaders, limited qualitative research has examined their influence on administrator retention, job satisfaction, commitment, and leadership effectiveness. This qualitative phenomenological study explored administrators' lived experiences with leadership coaching and professional learning. The study addressed three research questions examining how these experiences influence administrator retention, which aspects are perceived as most valuable for enhancing job satisfaction and commitment, and how leadership development affects leadership effectiveness and the overall professional experience. Data were collected from building- and district-level administrators through interviews, focus groups, surveys, and archival documents and analyzed using thematic analysis with triangulation. Findings revealed that leadership coaching enhanced confidence, self-awareness, reflection, and decision-making, while meaningful professional learning and supportive relationships strengthened job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and retention. The findings support integrating leadership coaching with professional learning to strengthen leadership capacity and promote sustainable school improvement.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

School leadership stability plays a critical role in sustaining effective instructional practices, positive school culture, and long-term organizational improvement. Yet school districts across the United States continue to experience high rates of administrator turnover, particularly among principals and district-level leaders. Frequent leadership changes disrupt continuity, weaken staff morale, and undermine improvement initiatives intended to support student achievement Mascall & Leithwood, (2010). As the demands placed on school administrators increase, understanding how districts can better support leaders and encourage long-term commitment has become an urgent priority. This action research study investigates the relationship between leadership development, executive coaching, and administrator retention, with the goal of identifying practices that foster job satisfaction, professional growth, and sustained leadership stability.

Background

The issue of administrator retention is both professionally and personally significant. In educational settings, administrators are expected to serve as instructional leaders, organizational managers, culture builders, and community liaisons, often under intense accountability pressures. These responsibilities, combined with limited support structures, contribute to burnout and attrition. Observations within school and district contexts reveal that even highly capable administrators frequently leave their positions due to overwhelming demands, insufficient professional support, or limited opportunities for reflective growth.

As an educational leader having worked within various K–12 settings, as well as various education service agencies, the researcher has directly observed the consequences of leadership turnover on students, staff, and school improvement efforts. Frequent changes in leadership disrupt relationships, delay implementation of instructional initiatives, and create uncertainty among teachers, families, and the school community as a whole. On the other hand, administrators who receive ongoing professional learning and individualized leadership support appear more confident, resilient, and committed to their roles. These observations underscore the importance of examining leadership development and executive coaching as potential mechanisms for improving administrator retention.

Administrator turnover also carries substantial organizational costs. Districts invest considerable resources in recruiting, hiring, and onboarding new leaders, often only to repeat the process within a few years. Beyond financial implications, turnover erodes institutional knowledge and weakens the collective capacity of schools to sustain improvement over time. Grissom and Bartanen (2019) contended that addressing administrator retention is essential not only for leadership well-being but also for ensuring stable, high-quality educational environments.

Capstone Focus

The focus of this doctoral capstone emerged through sustained reflection on leadership experiences and organizational practices within educational settings. Despite the availability of leadership preparation programs, many administrators report feeling isolated once they enter leadership roles. Traditional professional development models

often emphasize compliance or technical skills while overlooking the emotional, relational, and reflective dimensions of leadership. Targeted leadership development, executive coaching, and job-embedded professional learning offer promising alternatives by providing personalized support, opportunities for reflection, and targeted growth aligned with leaders' real-world challenges.

This action research study centers on exploring how traditional approaches to general leadership development, and executive coaching initiatives influence administrators' leadership development and their decisions to remain in their roles. By examining administrators' perceptions of coaching, mentoring, and professional learning experiences, the study seeks to identify which supports are most meaningful in enhancing job satisfaction, leadership effectiveness, and long-term commitment. The capstone is designed to inform district-level decision-making and contribute to the development of sustainable leadership support systems.

Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do administrators describe the impact of leadership development opportunities on their effectiveness and overall professional experience?
2. How does participation in leadership coaching and professional learning programs influence school administrator retention?
3. What aspects of leadership coaching and professional learning do administrators perceive as most valuable in enhancing job satisfaction and commitment to their roles?

Expected Outcomes

The expected outcomes of this study include increased understanding of how leadership development and executive coaching contribute to administrator retention. Initial actions will involve gathering qualitative data through interviews, focus groups, and document analysis to capture administrators' lived experiences with leadership support initiatives. Through this process, the study aims to identify patterns related to job satisfaction, professional growth, and perceived organizational support.

Desired outcomes include improved retention of school administrators, greater continuity in leadership, and enhanced organizational stability. Findings may also support the development of leadership pipelines, mentoring structures, and coaching models that promote resilience and reflective practice. By strengthening leadership support systems, districts may foster healthier work environments and more sustainable leadership careers.

Fiscal Implications

Administrator turnover carries significant financial implications for school districts. Costs associated with recruitment, hiring, onboarding, and leadership transitions place ongoing strain on district budgets. Leadership development and executive coaching programs require initial investment; however, these costs may be offset by reduced turnover, improved leadership effectiveness, and long-term organizational stability.

This study will consider the fiscal implications of leadership support initiatives by examining how targeted investments in professional learning and coaching compare to the recurring costs of administrator attrition. Understanding the cost-benefit relationship

may assist districts in making informed decisions about allocating resources toward sustainable leadership development strategies.

Summary

This chapter introduced the problem of administrator turnover and the need for effective leadership support systems in K–12 education. The background highlighted the professional significance of leadership stability and the researcher’s role within an educational setting. The capstone focus emphasized the potential of leadership development and executive coaching to enhance administrator retention. Research questions, expected outcomes, and fiscal implications were outlined to frame the study’s purpose and scope.

Chapter 2 will present a review of the literature related to leadership development, executive coaching, professional learning, and administrator retention, providing a theoretical and empirical foundation for the study.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

The retention of school administrators is a critical and persistent challenge in K–12 education systems across the United States. High turnover among principals, assistant principals, and district-level leaders such as superintendents, assistant superintendents, directors of curriculum and student services disrupts school improvement efforts, affects teacher morale, and diminishes student outcomes (Buckman, 2021; Leithwood & Sun, 2018; Levin & Bradley, 2019). As the expectations placed upon school administrators continue to intensify, ranging from instructional leadership and data use to crisis management, community engagement, political demands, and organizational oversight, many districts struggle to maintain a stable, well-prepared leadership workforce (Burr, 2025; Darling-Hammond et al., 2022; Levin & Bradley, 2019). The literature consistently affirms that stable, effective leadership is a prerequisite for sustained school improvement, particularly in the context of increasing complexity and accountability (Leithwood & Sun, 2018; Levin & Bradley, 2019).

In response to these challenges, school systems have increasingly turned to leadership development initiatives, including executive coaching, mentoring, job-embedded professional learning, and reflective practice. These supports aim not only to strengthen the leadership capacity of administrators but also to improve their job satisfaction, self-efficacy, and organizational commitment, factors closely linked to retention. Research demonstrates that leadership development opportunities, when

implemented with fidelity and aligned to administrators' real-world needs, can produce meaningful improvements in leadership

performance, organizational climate, and leader longevity (Jacob et al., 2015; Darling-Hammond et al., 2022; Peláez Zuberbuhler et al., 2020). Similarly, qualitative research highlights administrators' perceptions that individualized coaching helps them navigate complexity, develop adaptability, and remain committed to their roles (Clark, 2024).

Despite this growing body of research, the literature on administrator retention remains fragmented, with studies varying widely in methods, conceptual frameworks, and definitions of professional learning. Transformational leadership, an increasingly central model in school improvement research, emerges repeatedly as an important factor in retention yet is often not explicitly defined or linked to coaching and professional learning (Coleman-Hill, 2015; Leithwood & Sun, 2018; Trevillion, 2018). This gap makes it difficult for practitioners and policy leaders to determine which leadership development approaches yield the strongest, most sustainable effects for K–12 and Intermediate Unit administrators.

This literature review addresses these gaps by synthesizing research across five interrelated domains: administrator retention trends and challenges; transformational leadership as a conceptual foundation; leadership development and professional learning structures; executive coaching and mentoring; and reflective practice focused on administrators' perceptions of leadership support and retention. The review incorporates studies across qualitative, and mixed-methods traditions, emphasizing those that directly

examine the relationship between leadership support structures and administrator stability.

A central emphasis of this chapter is the examination of two high-impact studies: a controlled trial of coaching-based leadership development (Peláez Zuberbuhler et al., 2020) and a qualitative dissertation exploring executive coaching and leader adaptability (Clark, 2024). These studies provide methodologically rich insights into how structured coaching influences leadership growth, organizational resilience, and retention. Their findings also illuminate the mechanisms, such as reflective practice, individualized feedback, emotional intelligence development, and adaptive problem-solving, that connect coaching to sustained administrator engagement.

This chapter explicitly defines key constructs, including executive coaching, mentoring, reflective practice, professional learning, and transformational leadership, and clearly delineates the population under study. This literature review argues that high-quality leadership coaching and job-embedded professional learning serve as essential mechanisms for enhancing administrator retention. Across studies, the evidence demonstrates that when educational leaders engage in structured, relevant, and personalized development opportunities, they experience increased self-efficacy, stronger professional identity, greater adaptive capacity, and deeper commitment to their roles. As a result, leadership development is not merely a professional support, it is a foundational retention strategy capable of strengthening overall school system capacity.

Definitions of Key Constructs

A clear conceptual foundation is essential for understanding the relationship between leadership development initiatives and administrator retention. The literature uses several terms, executive coaching, mentoring, reflective practice, professional learning, and transformational leadership in overlapping yet distinct ways. This section provides precise definitions to ensure conceptual clarity throughout the chapter.

School Administrators/Intermediate Unit Administrators

For this review, school administrators include K–12 principals, assistant principals, and district-level leaders such as superintendents, assistant superintendents, directors of curriculum and instruction, and supervisors of student services. Within the context of an intermediate unit, administrators include directors and supervisors. Although their roles vary in scope, these administrators share core responsibilities related to instructional leadership, organizational management, and planning for improvement. They also experience similar pressures tied to accountability, public scrutiny, staffing, and resource allocation factors that influence job satisfaction and retention.

Executive Coaching

Executive coaching refers to a structured, one-on-one, job-embedded professional development process in which a trained coach partners with a leader to improve performance, strengthen leadership behaviors, and support personal and organizational growth. In educational settings, executive coaching emphasizes reflective questioning, goal setting, feedback, and problem-solving as mechanisms to enhance leadership capacity and adaptability (Boysen et al., 2018; Clark, 2024). Executive coaching differs

from traditional supervision or evaluation; it is non-evaluative, individualized, and future-oriented, focused on building self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and strategic thinking. Coaches may assist administrators in navigating complex organizational changes, managing teams, addressing instructional challenges, or aligning actions with district priorities. Across studies, executive coaching is associated with improvements in confidence, decision-making, job satisfaction, and retention (Peláez Zuberbuhler et al., 2020; Seay & Muscarella, 2024).

Mentoring

Mentoring is a professional relationship in which a more experienced leader provides guidance, advice, and support to a novice or less experienced administrator. While coaching focuses on reflection and leadership skill improvement, mentoring emphasizes knowledge transmission, organizational socialization, and career-stage-performance support. Mentors help new administrators understand local policies, navigate political environments, and access professional networks.

For early-career administrators, the mentor-mentee relationship is frequently cited as a foundational support that contributes to reduced burnout, stronger professional identity, and increased retention (Kelton & Talan, 2023). Mentoring may occur formally through district induction programs or informally through collegial relationships.

Reflective Practice

Reflective practice refers to the deliberate process of examining one's actions, decisions, and assumptions to improve future practice. Schön's (1983) foundational work describes reflection as a continuous cycle of action, reflection, and refinement,

encouraging practitioners to thoughtfully analyze their experiences and use those insights to inform future behavior. In educational leadership, reflective practice is especially powerful, enhancing administrators' ability to unpack complex problems, learn from prior successes and missteps, and adapt with agility to evolving challenges in the school environment.

Reflective practice lies at the core of effective executive coaching, where coaching sessions provide structured opportunities for school/district leaders to articulate their reasoning, identify behavioral patterns and explore alternative strategies in a supportive context. Leaders who engage consistently in reflection are shown to develop greater clarity in their decision-making, improved emotional regulation, and heightened adaptability, all qualities that support leadership longevity and resilience under pressure (Clark, 2024; Trevillion, 2018).

Additionally, reflective practice fosters increased self-awareness about individual strengths, weaknesses, and biases, allowing administrators to become more intentional in their leadership approaches. This self-awareness encourages continuous professional growth and cultivates humility, open-mindedness, and a readiness to learn from others within the school community. By modeling and promoting reflection among staff, school leaders help establish a culture of continuous improvement, where feedback is valued, learning from mistakes is normalized, and innovation is seen as a collaborative process. Reflective leadership not only leads to better individual outcomes for administrators but also helps transform schools into adaptive, responsive learning organizations that are better equipped to meet the needs of students and staff alike.

Professional Learning

Professional learning encompasses the ongoing formal and informal opportunities through which administrators build their knowledge, skills, and dispositions to lead effective schools. This includes workshops, coaching, mentoring, professional learning communities, university coursework, leadership academies, and job-embedded problem solving.

High-quality professional learning is sustained and ongoing, not episodic, job-embedded, connected to real work, collaborative, involving peer learning, aligned with district goals and leadership standards, contextually relevant, and addresses local needs. Studies demonstrate that professional learning contributes significantly to administrator self-efficacy, instructional leadership capacity, and retention (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022; Gornto, 2023; Prothero, 2015).

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is a leadership model in which leaders inspire and motivate followers to exceed expectations, embrace organizational goals, and pursue continuous improvement (Bass & Riggio, 2006). The research focuses on four major components that support this thought pattern.

Idealized influence involves leaders modeling ethical, mission-driven behaviors and serving as strong role models for their teams. Through their commitment to values and principles, transformational leaders earn the trust and respect of followers, setting a high standard for integrity and professionalism. Motivation is demonstrated by leaders who communicate a compelling vision that unites and energizes stakeholders. These

leaders articulate clear and ambitious goals, and their enthusiasm fosters collective engagement and optimism around a shared purpose.

Intellectual stimulation encourages creativity, problem-solving, and innovation within the organization. Transformational leaders challenge assumptions, welcome new ideas, and create an environment where independent and critical thinking are not only allowed but celebrated. They see setbacks as learning opportunities and empower their teams to develop creative solutions to complex problems.

Individualized consideration refers to the leaders' attention to the unique needs and growth goals of each follower. Through mentorship, active listening, and personalized support, transformational leaders nurture professional development, recognize individual strengths, and create a workplace where all members feel valued and supported. Together, these four behaviors make transformational leadership a powerful approach for cultivating engaged, resilient, and high-performing teams both in education and across other fields.

Within educational settings, transformational leadership has been consistently linked to improved instructional practices, stronger school climates, and increased teacher commitment (Quin et al., 2015). Importantly for this review, transformational leadership is also associated with administrator retention, as leaders who develop these behaviors experience stronger relationships, clearer leadership identity, more effective team dynamics, and greater resilience (Bonsu & Twum-Danso, 2018).

Transformational leadership intersects directly with coaching and professional learning. This type of coaching strengthens individualized consideration and reflection.

Professional learning enhances intellectual stimulation and innovation. Mentoring supports the development of mission-driven leadership behaviors. Transformational leadership provides an essential conceptual foundation for understanding how coaching and development programs influence administrator stability.

Administrator Retention: Challenges and Trends

Administrator retention continues to be one of the most critical and complex issues facing K–12 education systems in the United States. Schools rely heavily on stable, skilled, and committed leaders to guide instructional programs, support teachers, oversee operations, and engage communities. Consistent research indicates that many schools and districts, particularly those serving historically marginalized or economically disadvantaged communities, experience persistent turnover among principals, assistant principals, and district-level administrators, including superintendents and directors of curriculum and student services (Levin & Bradley, 2019). This instability disrupts school improvement efforts, reduces organizational coherence, and diminishes the likelihood of achieving long-term educational goals. As the expectations for school administrators have expanded over the last two decades, the challenges associated with retaining effective leaders have intensified, prompting researchers and policymakers to focus renewed attention on understanding the causes and consequences of administrator turnover and the supports most likely to mitigate it.

The Centrality of Leadership Stability to School Effectiveness

In a comprehensive review of research on school leadership, Leithwood and Sun (2018) conclude that principals exert considerable influence on student outcomes,

surpassed only by classroom instruction among school-based factors. Their analysis highlights the significant impact of leaders who cultivate collaborative cultures, provide instructional guidance, and maintain high expectations for teaching and learning. When such leaders remain in their roles for sustained periods, schools benefit from consistent direction, stronger professional cultures, and more coherent instructional systems. In contrast, frequent leadership turnover creates uncertainty and fractures school improvement efforts, often setting back progress by several years.

Further research emphasizes the detrimental consequences of administrator turnover, citing national evidence demonstrating that principal attrition disrupts teacher professional development, inhibits the implementation of reform initiatives, and negatively affects school climate. The analysis draws on data from the study of Levin and Bradley in the Learning Policy Institute and the National Association of Secondary School Principals, illustrating that the turnover of principals, particularly in high-poverty schools, leads to declines in student achievement and increases in teacher attrition. According to the findings, maintaining stable leadership is not simply a matter of personnel management but a prerequisite for sustained teaching and learning improvements (Levin and Bradley, 2019).

The Scope and Nature of Leadership Turnover

Administrator turnover occurs across school and district levels, though the nature of the work varies among principals, assistant principals, superintendents, and district directors. Principals often experience turnover due to overwhelming responsibilities related to instructional supervision, personnel management, discipline, family

engagement, and high-stakes accountability. Assistant principals face similar pressures, often with fewer opportunities to exercise decision-making authority, yet with substantial day-to-day responsibilities. Superintendents and district-level administrators navigate intense political scrutiny, budgetary constraints, and governance challenges that contribute to frequent leadership shifts at the district level (Schwartz & DiLiberti, n.d.). These systemic pressures create conditions where even highly capable leaders feel “on call” nearly constantly, resulting in chronic stress and increased likelihood of departure.

The broader organizational environment also plays a role. Blaushild & Seelig (2024) found that administrators often leave not because of a lack of skill or passion but because of weak organizational conditions, such as insufficient support from district leaders, unclear expectations, lack of trust, and inconsistent professional learning opportunities. Their research examines the importance of relational leadership and shared purpose, suggesting that when leaders feel connected to a clear mission and supported by their organizations, they are more likely to remain in their roles. This perspective aligns with wider systems theory, which explains that individuals are more likely to persist when the surrounding environment fosters conditions for success and well-being. Leadership turnover does not affect only administrators; it has cascading consequences for teachers. A growing body of evidence indicates that teachers are more likely to remain in their schools when supported by strong, stable leaders. Shuls and Flores (2020) demonstrate that principal support and access to high-quality professional development are key predictors of teacher retention. When principals leave or when they lack sufficient support to develop effective leadership behaviors, teachers experience

increased stress, diminished trust and reduced professional stability. As a result, leadership turnover indirectly harms student achievement by weakening teacher retention and instructional continuity.

These findings are significant because they illustrate a reciprocal relationship between administrator and teacher retention. Administrators who feel capable and supported are better positioned to cultivate positive working conditions for teachers, conditions that reinforce administrators' own job satisfaction and professional fulfillment. Administrators overwhelmed by teacher attrition, staffing shortages, or poor working conditions face greater stress and are more likely to leave their roles. As a result, administrator retention and teacher retention are mutually reinforcing challenges that must be addressed together.

Systemic Contributors to Administrator Turnover

The causes of administrator turnover are multifaceted and often rooted in systemic issues. Common contributors include inadequate preparation, overwhelming job demands, emotional exhaustion, insufficient professional learning opportunities, and a lack of individualized support, such as coaching or mentoring. Many administrators report feeling isolated in their roles, lacking safe spaces to reflect on challenges, receive feedback, or develop adaptive leadership strategies (Clark, 2024; Trevillion, 2018). The absence of structured, job-embedded supports undermines leaders' sense of efficacy and increases the likelihood of burnout.

An intensified workforce environment is another significant contributor. With responsibilities ranging from instructional oversight, state and federal mandates, to crisis

management, exacerbated in the post-pandemic era, administrators frequently juggle competing priorities with limited resources. These conditions can make the role unsustainable without additional support, especially for early-career leaders who may lack the experience or mentoring needed to navigate complex school environments effectively (Kelton & Talan, 2023).

District-level administrators face unique challenges as well. Superintendents, Assistant Superintendents, and department directors operate in highly political contexts, balancing community expectations, board dynamics, and state policy mandates. Schwartz and DiLiberti (n.d.) found that while many superintendents report satisfaction with their roles, turnover remains high due to political tensions, rising demands, and limited autonomy.

Equity, School Context, and Differential Turnover Rates

Administrator turnover disproportionately impacts schools serving high-poverty and marginalized student populations. Research from Donley et al. (2020) notes that leadership instability is especially acute in urban and rural districts with limited resources, higher student needs, and more challenging working conditions. These schools face persistent turnover cycles that compound existing inequities: when experienced administrators leave, schools often struggle to recruit and maintain qualified leaders, which in turn affects teacher stability and student outcomes. Without targeted retention strategies, these schools remain caught in a revolving door of leadership change.

The structural inequities that drive differential turnover rates underscore the importance of systemic solutions, including improved professional learning, coaching-

based interventions, and policies that address workload, compensation, and preparation. Such strategies must be tailored to the school context; what supports a superintendent in a large district may differ from what a novice principal in a rural school requires.

The Role of Professional Learning and Support in Retention

A prominent theme across retention literature is the critical role of ongoing professional development and individualized support. Jacob et al. (2015) found through a randomized controlled trial that structured leadership development for principals led to reductions in teacher turnover and improvements in school climate. Leaders who participated in these programs reported feeling more prepared, more confident, and more effective in instructional leadership. Darling-Hammond et al. (2022) emphasize the importance of job-embedded professional learning, especially mentoring, coaching, and peer networks, in equipping new administrators with the practical leadership competencies needed for long-term success. These supports not only enhance performance but also bolster leaders' sense of belonging and purpose within their organizations.

Administrator retention is shaped by an interaction of leadership characteristics, organizational conditions, and systemic structures. Research consistently shows that stable, effective leadership improves teacher retention, contributes to sustained instructional improvement, and enhances student outcomes (Leithwood & Sun, 2018; Levin & Bradley, 2019). However, high-pressure working conditions, inadequate professional support, and insufficient preparation continue to push administrators out of their roles.

The literature demonstrates that supports such as coaching, mentoring, and structured professional learning significantly improve leadership effectiveness and job satisfaction. These interventions address key drivers of turnover, such as burnout, isolation, and lack of capacity, making them essential strategies for strengthening retention across schools and districts.

Transformational Leadership as a Foundation for Administrator Retention

Transformational leadership has emerged as one of the most widely studied and influential leadership frameworks in educational research. Over the past several decades, scholars have increasingly relied on transformational leadership theory to understand how school administrators influence organizational culture, teacher commitment, school climate, and student achievement. As the responsibilities placed on administrators in school districts and intermediate units continue to expand, transformational leadership provides a robust conceptual foundation for analyzing how leadership behaviors affect not only school outcomes but also administrators' own well-being, job satisfaction, and decisions to remain in or leave their roles. For this reason, transformational leadership offers a critical lens through which to understand administrator retention and the organizational supports, such as executive coaching, mentoring, and professional learning, that help develop and sustain effective leaders.

This section presents an expanded examination of transformational leadership as a theoretical anchor for administrator retention. It begins by defining transformational leadership in the context of education and distinguishing it from related leadership models. It then explores empirical research demonstrating how transformational

leadership behaviors influence organizational outcomes and administrators' own commitment to their work. The section continues by analyzing how coaching, mentoring, reflective practice, and professional learning serve as mechanisms for strengthening transformational leadership skills. It presents a synthesized argument for why transformational leadership is uniquely suited to explaining the relationship between leadership supports and administrator retention.

Defining Transformational Leadership in Educational Settings

The concept of transformational leadership was first introduced by Burns (1978) in his foundational work on political leadership, where he distinguished transformational leadership from transactional leadership. Transactional leaders emphasize exchanges, reward, compliance, and monitoring, while transformational leaders inspire followers to pursue shared values, higher-order goals, and organizational improvement. Building on Burns's work, Bass (1985) expanded the theory by articulating four core components of transformational leadership: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. These four components have since become the dominant framework used to study transformational leadership across numerous disciplines, including education.

In educational settings, transformational leadership refers to the ability of school and district administrators to inspire staff, articulate a compelling vision for teaching and learning, encourage professional growth, and support innovation and inquiry (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006). Transformational leaders cultivate a shared sense of purpose, foster collective commitment, and build organizational cultures in

which teachers and staff feel motivated to improve their practice. Unlike more managerial or bureaucratic models of school leadership, transformational leadership emphasizes the relational and motivational dimensions of leadership, focusing on how leaders influence beliefs, norms, emotions, and capacities within the school community.

The Four Components of Transformational Leadership

Idealized Influence

Idealized influence refers to leaders' ability to model ethical behavior, demonstrate integrity, and earn the trust and respect of followers (Bass & Riggio, 2006). In schools, administrators with idealized influence set a moral and professional example for teachers and staff. Principals who demonstrate fairness, consistency, and ethical decision-making cultivate trust, which research identifies as a central predictor of staff engagement and retention (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). When administrators embody the values they expect others to uphold, teachers are more likely to buy into school goals and remain committed to improvement efforts.

Inspirational Motivation

Inspirational motivation involves communicating a compelling vision, expressing optimism about the future, and motivating followers to achieve shared goals. School leaders who articulate a clear, coherent vision for teaching and learning create direction and alignment across their organizations (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006). This sense of shared purpose provides emotional energy and helps staff navigate challenges. For administrators themselves, having a clear sense of mission contributes to professional resilience and reduces feelings of burnout and role ambiguity, two key predictors of

leadership turnover (Berkovich & Eyal, 2020).

Intellectual Stimulation

Intellectual stimulation occurs when leaders encourage staff to question assumptions, innovate, and collaboratively solve problems (Bass & Riggio, 2006). In educational settings, administrators who foster intellectual stimulation create an environment in which teachers feel empowered to experiment with new instructional practices, analyze data reflectively, and engage in continuous learning. Intellectual stimulation is strongly linked to school culture and teacher engagement, which in turn contribute to more stable school environments (Quin et al., 2015).

Individualized Considerations

Individualized consideration refers to leaders' attention to the needs, strengths, and development of individual employees. In schools, this involves providing professional support, coaching, feedback, and growth opportunities. Teachers who feel valued by their administrators report greater job satisfaction, stronger organizational commitment, and lower intentions to leave their schools (Bogler, 2001). Individualized consideration also influences administrators: leaders who practice reflection and develop strong relational skills experience greater confidence, improved self-efficacy, and enhanced capacity to cope with professional stressors (Clark, 2024; Trevillion, 2018).

Transformational Leadership and Positive School Outcomes

Numerous studies have documented the positive effects of transformational leadership on a wide range of school outcomes. Research consistently shows that transformational leaders influence teacher motivation, instructional quality, school

climate, and ultimately student achievement. While the magnitude of these effects varies depending on context, the overarching pattern across decades of research is clear: transformational leadership matters.

For example, Quin et al. (2015) conducted a meta-analysis of transformational leadership research in schools and found a strong positive relationship between transformational leadership and student achievement, mediated by factors such as teacher commitment, professional learning, and school climate. Leithwood and Sun (2018) also identify transformational leadership as central to building the organizational conditions necessary for high-quality teaching and learning. Their review highlights the role of transformational leaders in building collective efficacy, a shared belief among staff that the school can achieve meaningful improvement. Similarly, Hallinger (2011) notes that transformational leadership contributes to a collaborative culture and shared decision-making, which are foundational to sustained school improvement. When teachers feel that the principal supports their growth, values their contributions, and provides leadership opportunities, they are more likely to remain at the school and contribute to a positive organizational environment.

These findings reinforce a key principle: school improvement is not merely a technical process but a human process. Transformational leaders facilitate improvement not only through strategic planning and instructional supervision but also through relationships, culture-building, and empowerment.

Transformational Leadership and Administrator Well-Being

While much research has focused on how transformational leadership influences

teachers and students, a growing body of literature highlights its impact on administrators as well (Burr, 2025; Darling-Hammond et al., 2022; Leithwood & Sun, 2018). Scholars have begun to emphasize that transformational leadership is not only an outward-facing process but also an inward one, shaping how leaders perceive their roles, managing challenges, and sustaining long-term engagement in their work. Transformational leadership behaviors, particularly individualized consideration, reflective practice, and strategic visioning, play a significant role in strengthening administrators' sense of purpose by helping them connect daily decisions to broader organizational values and goals. These behaviors also foster emotional resilience, enabling leaders to navigate the complexities of school environments with greater adaptability and confidence. They enhance professional self-efficacy by reinforcing administrators' belief in their capacity to influence positive change, support their teams effectively, and guide their institutions through evolving educational demands.

Emotional Capacity and Burnout Prevention

Administrators who adopt transformational approaches report lower levels of emotional exhaustion, a major predictor of burnout and turnover (Berkovich & Eyal, 2020). By engaging in leadership practices that emphasize inspiration, relationship-building, and collective purpose,

These leaders often experience a renewed sense of motivation and psychological well-being. The emphasis on shared leadership and collaboration reduces the isolation often experienced by school leaders, creating networks of mutual support and distributing responsibility across teams rather than allowing it to fall solely on the principal or central

office administrator. This collaborative climate not only lightens individual workload but also promotes a sense of belonging and collective efficacy within the school community. Vision-driven leadership provides a sense of coherence amid competing demands, offering administrators a guiding framework that helps them prioritize initiatives, align stakeholder expectations, and maintain clarity during periods of organizational change. Together, these elements of transformational leadership contribute to healthier work environments and more sustainable leadership trajectories.

Professional Identity and Self-Efficacy

Transformational leadership encourages a strong professional identity, which in turn enhances administrators' intrinsic motivation and long-term commitment to their roles. When leaders see themselves as purposeful, capable, and aligned with the broader mission of the school, they are more likely to approach challenges with enthusiasm and a sense of agency. Research indicates that leaders with strong self-efficacy are more persistent, more confident in decision-making, and less likely to leave their positions when faced with adversity (Federici & Skaalvik, 2012). This confidence becomes a stabilizing force, allowing administrators to remain focused on instructional and organizational improvement even in the face of budget constraints, accountability pressures, or interpersonal conflicts. Individualized consideration when practiced by administrators toward staff and modeled for them in coaching and mentoring relationships helps leaders better understand their own strengths and areas for growth. Through reflective dialogue, personalized feedback, and attention to the unique needs of others, administrators also become more attuned to their own professional development

pathways, fostering continuous learning and reinforcing their evolving sense of competence and purpose.

Strong relationships built through transformational leadership contribute to a leader's sense of belonging and loyalty to their schools or districts. Administrators who feel connected to their staff and communities report greater job satisfaction and longer tenure (Blaushild & Seelig, 2024; Shuls & Flores, 2020). This relational dimension is especially important for administrators in high-poverty or high-need schools, where the emotional labor of leadership is intensified.

Coaching, Mentoring, and Professional Learning Strengthening Transformational Leadership

One of the core arguments of this chapter is that transformational leadership provides the conceptual foundation for understanding why supports such as coaching, mentoring, and reflective practice contribute to administrator retention. Each of these supports enhances the specific competencies associated with transformational leadership and bolsters administrators' ability to navigate the complexities of their roles.

Executive coaching is particularly well aligned with transformational leadership development. Coaching sessions typically involve reflective questioning, goal setting, feedback, problem-solving, and emotionally intelligent leadership strategies, all of which strengthen transformational leadership behaviors. Peláez Zuberbuhler et al.'s (2020) controlled trial demonstrated that leadership coaching significantly improved administrators' capacities in individualized consideration, emotional intelligence, and strategic thinking. These improvements contributed not only to enhanced performance

but also to greater professional confidence and role commitment.

Clark's (2024) qualitative dissertation further illustrates how executive coaching supports the development of adaptability, reflective practice, and relational leadership. Principals and district leaders who participated in coaching described becoming more self-aware, more effective communicators, and more aligned with their organizational vision. These are key attributes of transformational leadership.

Building on these internal benefits of transformational leadership, mentoring plays a vital role in helping early-career administrators develop the relational and ethical dimensions necessary to sustain such leadership over time. Through structured guidance and authentic professional relationships, mentoring provides emerging leaders with opportunities to observe and practice the behaviors that define effective, people-centered leadership. Experienced mentors model idealized influence by demonstrating integrity, sound decision-making, and effective interpersonal communication in real-world contexts, offering mentees concrete examples of how transformational principles translate into daily administrative practice. In addition, mentors often serve as trusted thought partners who help new administrators navigate complex organizational dynamics, reflect on their leadership choices, and manage the emotional demands of the role. (Kelton & Talan 2023) argue that mentoring reduces new administrators' sense of isolation and increases their confidence, making them more likely to remain in their roles. By fostering both competence and connectedness, mentoring ultimately strengthens the pipeline of school leaders who are prepared to enact and sustain transformational approaches.

Reflective practice, central to both coaching and transformational leadership,

enhances administrators' ability to analyze complex situations, question assumptions, and consider new perspectives. Schön's (1983) framework of reflection-on-action shows how leaders learn from experience to improve future performance. As administrators engage in reflective practice, they develop the intellectual stimulation component of transformational leadership, promoting a culture of inquiry and innovation within their schools.

Professional Learning as Organizational Support

High-quality professional learning supports transformational leadership by providing administrators with knowledge, strategies, and collaborative networks. (Darling-Hammond et al. 2022) found that leadership development programs that are job-embedded, sustained, and collaborative significantly enhance administrators' instructional leadership and organizational management skills, both of which are essential for transformational practice. Professional learning communities, leadership academies, and district-level cohorts create environments in which administrators can engage in intellectual stimulation, share ideas, and support each other in solving complex problems.

Together, the empirical and theoretical literature demonstrates that transformational leadership is suited to explaining how leadership development supports and influences administrator retention. Transformational leadership highlights relational trust, which research repeatedly links to administrators' job satisfaction and decisions to stay (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Blaushild & Seelig, 2024). Its emphasis on vision and purpose strengthens leaders' internal motivation, helping them withstand professional pressures that might otherwise lead to attrition (Berkovich & Eyal, 2020).

Transformational leadership integrates emotional and cognitive dimensions, which align with the mechanisms of coaching and mentoring that improve leader resilience (Clark, 2024). The model aligns with the professional learning structures such as coaching, mentoring, PLCs, and leadership academies that research identifies as essential for supporting administrators, especially new or struggling leaders (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022).

The four dimensions of transformational leadership map directly onto known drivers of retention, such as relational support, meaningful work, professional growth, and organizational fit. For these reasons, transformational leadership provides not only a descriptive framework for understanding administrator behavior but also a generative theory that explains why and how supports such as executive coaching improve retention.

Leadership Coaching and Professional Learning as Mechanisms for Administrator Retention

Leadership coaching and professional learning have become central strategies for cultivating effective school administrators and improving retention in K–12 districts. As the complexity of the educational landscape continues to intensify, marked by accountability pressures, teacher shortages, community expectations, and rapid policy shifts, administrators face unprecedented demands on their time, emotional capacity, and leadership skill set. Research consistently demonstrates that targeted supports such as executive coaching, mentoring, reflective practice, and structured professional learning can significantly impact administrators' persistence, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment (Boysen et al., 2018; Clark, 2024; Darling-Hammond et al., 2022; Kelton &

Talan, 2023). This section examines the mechanisms through which leadership coaching and professional learning influence administrator retention, drawing on empirical studies, conceptual frameworks, and practice-based evidence.

The section begins with an overview of leadership coaching and its documented benefits for administrator development and retention. It then synthesizes research on the impact of professional learning on administrators' sense of competence, preparedness, and belonging. It also explores how coaching and professional learning intersect with broader organizational and environmental conditions that shape retention, such as workload, role clarity, and support structures. Building on this foundation, it presents a theoretically informed argument connecting coaching and professional learning to transformational leadership, demonstrating how these mechanisms foster adaptive, resilient leaders capable of remaining in their positions long term.

Conceptual Foundations of Leadership Coaching for Administrators

Leadership coaching has grown rapidly in education over the last decade, becoming a widely adopted support structure for principals, assistant principals, and district-level leaders. Although coaching models vary, most share core elements: individualized goal setting, reflective dialogue, performance feedback, problem-solving support, and leadership skill development (Boysen et al., 2018; Seay & Muscarella, 2024). Coaching is also typically non-evaluative, voluntary, and confidential, distinguishing it from supervision or evaluation.

Executive coaching in educational settings aims to improve leadership effectiveness, strengthen personal and professional competencies, and enhance the

administrator's capacity to manage complex challenges (Clark, 2024). Coaches often focus on domains such as, emotional intelligence, conflict resolution, team leadership, instructional leadership, strategic planning, work-life balance, systems thinking, and organizational change and culture.

These domains align directly with the skill sets required for transformational leadership and sustained administrative success. Leadership coaching provides administrators with a rare opportunity for professional reflection. Unlike teachers, who often engage in routine team meetings or grade-level collaboration, administrators frequently work in isolation and have limited opportunities to discuss challenges openly. Coaching creates protected space for vulnerable reflection, problem-solving, and personalized growth, elements that research identifies as critical for retention (Trevillion, 2018).

The Mechanisms of Coaching: How Change Occurs

Empirical research suggests that executive coaching influences administrator behavior and retention through several interconnected pathways that strengthen both personal leadership capacity and organizational commitment (Clark, 2024). One of the primary mechanisms is enhanced self-awareness, enabling administrators to better recognize their leadership strengths, limitations, and behavioral patterns. This increased self-awareness contributes to greater confidence and leadership efficacy, allowing administrators to approach complex challenges with assurance while reducing feelings of burnout and discouragement (Peláez Zuberbuhler et al., 2020). Coaching also promotes improved emotional regulation, equipping leaders to respond thoughtfully to stress,

conflict, and uncertainty rather than reacting impulsively. As emotional regulation and self-awareness develop, administrators demonstrate more refined decision-making, characterized by greater strategic thinking, clearer prioritization, and stronger alignment between daily decisions and long-term school improvement goals (Seay & Muscarella, 2024).

These pathways further support greater adaptability, enabling leaders to navigate organizational change, competing demands, and evolving educational environments with resilience (Clark, 2024). Finally, coaching facilitates stronger alignment with organizational goals by clarifying expectations, strengthening goal-setting practices, and reinforcing leaders' sense of purpose and commitment to their organizations (Baker & An, 2019). Collectively, these mechanisms illustrate how coaching fosters sustained leadership effectiveness while strengthening administrators' commitment to remain in leadership roles.

Empirical Evidence Supporting the Impact of Coaching on Administrator Retention

A growing body of research provides quantitative and qualitative evidence that coaching contributes to administrator retention by improving performance, well-being, and organizational commitment. Peláez Zuberbuhler et al. (2020) provided some of the strongest evidence through a controlled trial examining the impact of coaching-based leadership development. Their study found that participants demonstrated statistically significant improvements in leadership competencies compared to the control group. Improvements that included emotional intelligence, confidence, communication skills, and resilience, were factors directly tied to leader persistence. Administrators also

reported feeling more capable of handling job demands, which reduced intentions to leave.

Boysen et al. (2018) conducted a broad examination of the economic and organizational benefits of coaching, finding that coaching yields a positive return on investment for organizations. Participants in their study demonstrated increased productivity, stronger performance, and higher retention. For school districts, where principal turnover carries significant financial and academic costs, these findings are particularly relevant. Stable leadership structures contribute to sustained school improvement, stronger teacher retention, and improved student outcomes (Donley et al., 2020).

Qualitative Evidence on Adaptability and Resilience

Clark's (2024) qualitative dissertation offers nuanced insights into how coaching enhances administrators' adaptability, change management skills, and emotional resilience. Participants described coaching as transformative, highlighting how structured reflection helped them navigate competing demands, improve work-life balance, and maintain motivation. Many attributed their continued commitment to their roles directly to the support they received through coaching.

Trevillion found that coaching builds trust, reflective capacity, and alignment with professional goals. These relational and reflective outcomes foster feelings of competence and stability, which reduce turnover intentions (Trevillion, 2018). Another study highlighted the executive perceptions of coaching and found that participants consistently reported increases in self-efficacy, work engagement, and retention. Leaders

noted that coaching helped them manage complex interpersonal challenges, clarify organizational priorities, and sustain commitment through periods of transition or conflict (Seay & Muscarella, 2024). Together, these findings affirm that coaching is not merely a performance improvement strategy; it is a critical component of administrator well-being and long-term retention.

Professional Learning and Administrator Retention

In addition to coaching, professional learning plays a substantial role in supporting administrator retention. Administrators who participate in meaningful, job-embedded learning experiences report higher levels of satisfaction, preparedness, and professional identity (Darling-Hammond et al., Gornto, 2023 2022;). Professional learning for administrators can take many forms, including leadership academies, district or state induction programs, professional learning communities/networks, university-based preparation, workshops and conferences, mentoring networks, and job-embedded inquiry or action research.

While these structures vary widely, research also highlights several qualities of effective professional learning that correlate with retention, which include structures that are sustained over time, job-embedded, not episodic, collaborative, aligned with district goals, reflective, and relevant to current challenges that administrators and staff face every day.

Darling-Hammond et al. (2022) found that job-embedded professional learning, such as coaching, mentoring, and network-based support, has the strongest impact on administrator preparedness and effectiveness. Leaders who have opportunities to engage

in authentic problem-solving, receive feedback, and collaborate with peers report higher confidence in managing instructional leadership, organizational management, and community engagement. Increased role clarity and competence reduce stress and increase the likelihood of retention.

Early career administrators are at the highest risk for turnover, especially during the first five years (Kelton & Talan, 2023). Support during this period is therefore crucial. Kelton and Talan (2023) found that induction programs with targeted professional development significantly increased early administrators' commitment to their roles. Participants expressed that professional learning reduced feelings of isolation, increased their sense of belonging, improved their understanding of district expectations, strengthened problem-solving skills, and enhanced confidence and efficacy. These experiences contributed to a much stronger likelihood of remaining in the position.

Prothero (2015) highlighted the importance of continuous learning for principals, noting that administrators who regularly engage in professional development are more effective at supporting teachers, addressing instructional challenges, and maintaining a positive school culture. Continuous learning strengthens administrators' leadership identity and reinforces their dedication to their work. Gornito (2023) found in a quantitative study that professional development is directly correlated with leader self-efficacy and job satisfaction. Leaders who participated in ongoing learning reported feeling more capable and more fulfilled, two conditions shown to reduce turnover.

The Value of Mentoring in Leadership Development and Retention

Mentoring is another critical component of professional learning that is

particularly important for early-career administrators. Unlike coaching, mentoring typically involves guidance from a more experienced administrator who provides advice, shares knowledge, and helps the mentee navigate the political and cultural dimensions of school leadership.

Mentoring supports new administrators' organizational socialization, defined as their integration into the norms, expectations, and culture of their district (Kelton & Talan, 2023). New administrators frequently cite feeling overwhelmed, underprepared, or disconnected from district expectations. Mentors help bridge these gaps, facilitating smoother transitions into leadership roles and reducing early-career turnover. Beyond logistical support, mentoring provides emotional sustenance. Many administrators describe leadership as isolating. A trusted mentor offers reassurance, perspective, and validation, reducing emotional exhaustion and preventing burnout. Emotional support has been repeatedly identified as a central factor in administrator retention (Hawk, 2023; Schwartz & DiLiberti, n.d.).

Mentors also model transformational leadership behaviors, vision setting, ethical behavior, problem-solving, and individualized support. This modeling accelerates the development of transformational leadership in new administrators, which in turn contributes to their job satisfaction and commitment.

Reflective Practice as a Retention Mechanism

Reflective practice is another mechanism through which coaching and professional learning influence administrator retention. Schön's (1983) concept of reflection-on-action explains that leaders learn from their experiences by critically

examining their decisions, interactions, and assumptions. This ongoing process supports greater self-awareness, better decision-making, improved adaptable strategies, and emotional resilience. Through a systematic approach to thinking about their work, administrators can identify root causes of organizational problems and recognize their strengths and areas for growth.

Emerging research affirms that coaching greatly enhances an administrator's reflective capacity, making them more adept at navigating complex challenges (Clark, 2024; Trevillion, 2018). By engaging in reflective dialogue during coaching, leaders learn to reframe difficult situations as opportunities for learning, which helps reduce stress, foster emotional wellness, and enhance long-term persistence in their roles. Reflective supervision and structured reflective practices are especially valuable for boosting administrators' self-efficacy and overall wellness, contributing to higher job satisfaction and retention. When leaders routinely model reflection within their organizations, they create cultures of continuous improvement that support employee growth and foster a stronger sense of belonging. As administrators gain confidence in reflective strategies, they become more resilient and able to balance the complex demands of educational leadership.

Organizational Conditions That Mediate Coaching and Professional Learning Effects

While coaching and professional learning are powerful tools, their impact on retention is influenced by broader organizational conditions. Several factors mediate how effectively these supports translate into improved retention, including leadership beliefs,

the availability of collegial and administrative support, and the degree of shared or distributed leadership practiced within the school. When administrators in their respective roles have the authority to shape decision-making, foster collaborative culture, and align their goals with district values, they build greater trust and stability within their organizations (Blaushild & Seelig, 2024; Darling-Hammond et al., 2022). Factors such as workload, role clarity, compensation, and school climate interact with professional learning efforts to determine whether administrators feel competent and motivated to remain in their roles (Hawk, 2023; Levin & Bradley, 2019). These dynamics are especially pronounced in high-need environments, where tailored coaching and ongoing professional development must be accompanied by systemic supports to overcome stressors and competing expectations. As a result, the effectiveness of coaching and professional learning in promoting retention depends not only on the quality of these initiatives but also on the presence of supportive organizational structures and policies that reinforce leadership growth and continuity. Administrators face expanding responsibilities that often include supervision, instructional leadership, family engagement, crisis management, and compliance with policy mandates. High workload and role complexity can overshadow the benefits of coaching if organizational structures do not provide sufficient time or resources for leaders to apply what they learn (Donley et al., 2020).

Supportive district environments amplify the effects of coaching and learning. Leaders who perceive district administrators as supportive, communicative, and committed to professional growth are more likely to remain, while unsupportive or

incoherent district structures undermine retention, even when professional development is present. School culture can also amplify or diminish the benefits of leadership development. Administrators in relationally healthy environments experience stronger gains from coaching and learning, while hostile or toxic environments can negate these benefits (Blaushild & Seelig, 2024).

Connecting Coaching and Professional Learning to Transformational Leadership and Retention

Integrating the findings presented across Sections 3, 4, and 5, transformational leadership offers a robust theoretical framework that explains why coaching and professional learning exert such a powerful influence on administrator retention. Coaching, at its core, nurtures individualized consideration, enabling leaders to develop greater empathy and relational skills while providing meaningful, personalized support to their teams. This individualized approach encourages administrators to build trust and foster a supportive culture, which strengthens their sense of competence and belonging. Professional learning amplifies intellectual stimulation by equipping leaders with critical thinking skills and innovative problem-solving strategies, empowering them to adapt swiftly to challenges and promote ongoing improvement within their organizations. Mentoring plays a crucial role in reinforcing idealized influence, as leaders who engage in mentorship demonstrate ethical decision-making and authentic leadership qualities that inspire trust and reinforce integrity throughout the school community. Vision-driven learning supports motivation by enabling leaders to clearly articulate and enact a compelling vision, which in turn motivates stakeholders, aligns collective goals, and

helps sustain momentum for organizational growth. By synthesizing these elements, transformational leadership not only fosters holistic leadership development but also drives higher retention, job satisfaction, and stability among educational administrators. These four components map directly onto the transformational leadership framework (Bass & Riggio, 2006). As transformational leadership develops, administrators experience stronger relational ties, greater self-efficacy, clearer identity, and heightened motivation, all known predictors of retention.

Leadership coaching, mentoring, reflective practice, and professional learning function as powerful mechanisms for developing transformational leadership and improving administrator retention. These supports help administrators build the skills, confidence, relationships, and resilience needed to navigate the complexities of leadership. The empirical evidence is clear: leaders who receive sustained, job-embedded support are more effective, more satisfied, and more likely to remain in their roles (Clark, 2024; Jacob et al., 2015; Peláez Zuberbuhler et al., 2020; Seay & Muscarella, 2024).

These professional supports foster an environment where leaders not only deepen their own instructional expertise and change management abilities but also cultivate a culture of collaboration and trust within their schools. Well-designed coaching and training interventions equip administrators with strategies to address challenges such as staff motivation, organizational improvement, and cultural responsiveness, all of which are essential for rapid school improvement and long-term district success. As school and district environments continue to evolve, investing in high-quality professional development and mentoring broadens the leadership pipeline, supports diversity and

innovation, and ensures that promising leaders have clear pathways for growth.

Ultimately, developing transformational leaders through these mechanisms is a catalyst for both individual career persistence and driving positive change throughout the educational system.

Synthesis, Limitations, and Future Research Directions

The literature reviewed highlights a robust and consistent relationship between targeted leadership development initiatives and improved administrator retention. Across quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method studies, a clear pattern emerges: School leaders who participate in structured professional development, including executive coaching, mentoring, and reflective practice, demonstrate higher self-efficacy, increased job satisfaction, and a stronger commitment to their roles (Kelton & Talan, 2023; Peláez Zuberbuhler et al., 2020; Trevillion, 2018). These outcomes are particularly salient in the early career stages, where exposure to contextually relevant, job-embedded learning experiences appear to mitigate the risk of burnout and attrition (Burr, 2025; Darling-Hammond et al., 2022).

The efficacy of executive coaching is well-supported in both controlled and qualitative studies. For example, Peláez Zuberbuhler et al. (2020) conducted a controlled trial of a coaching-based leadership program, demonstrating statistically significant improvements in leadership competencies and retention rates among K-12 principals and district administrators. This study's methodological rigor, including random assignment and a pre- and post-intervention assessment, provides compelling evidence for coaching's causal impact on administrator performance and longevity. Complementing this

quantitative evidence, Clark's (2024) qualitative dissertation explored the adaptability and emotional intelligence of leaders receiving coaching. Through in-depth interviews with superintendents and assistant superintendents across diverse districts, Clark documented how executive coaching cultivates self-awareness, strategic problem-solving skills, and resilience, capabilities that directly contribute to sustained tenure and organizational stability. These studies underscore coaching as not merely a professional development tool but a critical strategy for cultivating adaptive, reflective, and committed school leadership.

Transformational leadership emerges as another consistent theme influencing administrator retention. Principals and district leaders who exhibit transformational behaviors, such as individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, and inspirational motivation, are more likely to create supportive school climates and foster professional growth among staff (Bonsu & Twum-Danso, 2018; Quin et al., 2015). These behaviors correlate strongly with retention because they enhance leader satisfaction, engender trust, and strengthen organizational commitment. Research by Baker and An (2019) highlights the integration of coaching into daily leadership practices as a mechanism for promoting transformational behaviors at scale. Districts implementing coaching as a priority report increased resilience among leaders, improved school culture, and reduced principal turnover. This alignment between leadership development interventions and transformational leadership outcomes supports the argument that coaching and reflective practice are instrumental for both individual and organizational sustainability.

Professional learning opportunities, particularly those emphasizing job-embedded

experiences, mentoring, and reflective practice, also contribute to enhanced administrator retention. Studies indicate that leaders who engage in sustained professional learning report not only increased confidence in handling operational and instructional challenges but also stronger alignment with organizational goals (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022; Feirsen & Weitzman, 2025; Gornto, 2023). The alignment and combination of coaching, mentoring, and structured professional development creates a comprehensive support system, enhancing both leadership capacity and organizational stability. For example, Kelton and Talan (2023) found that early-career administrators participating in multi-component professional learning programs experienced higher retention and demonstrated more effective leadership practices compared to peers without similar support. These findings suggest that retention is not driven by isolated interventions but by integrated, continuous, and contextually relevant leadership development strategies. Studies indicate that administrator retention has downstream impacts on broader school outcomes. Leithwood and Sun (2018) report that consistent, skilled leadership positively influences teacher retention, instructional quality, and student achievement. Additionally, frequent leadership turnover disrupts school improvement initiatives, diminishes teacher morale, and undermines long-term student success (Levin & Bradley, 2019; Donley et al., 2020). This body of evidence reinforces the critical role of sustained leadership development not only for individual administrators but also for overall educational effectiveness. The synthesis highlights the principle that leadership retention, when supported through coaching, mentoring, and reflective practice, represents a leverage point for systemic school improvement.

Limitations of the Studies

Despite strong empirical support for leadership development interventions, several limitations are evident across the literature related to this research. First, many studies rely on self-reported data, which may introduce bias related to social desirability or leader perception (Clark, 2024; Coleman-Hill, 2015). While qualitative interviews provide rich insights, they cannot always be generalized across contexts, particularly given the variability in district resources, student populations, and policies.

Additionally, the majority of studies focus on principals or superintendents within traditional K-12 settings, often excluding assistant principals, curriculum supervisors or intermediate unit staff. This limits the applicability of findings to the broader population of school administrators, who may face different professional demands and support needs (Blaushild & Seelig, 2024; Hawk, 2023). Several controlled trials, such as Peláez Zuberbuhler et al. (2020), use relatively small sample sizes, which constrains statistical power and reduces the ability to detect nuanced effects across diverse educational contexts.

Another emphasis is on the longitudinal data, which remains limited. While early-career interventions demonstrate short-term retention benefits (Kelton & Talan, 2023), fewer studies track the sustained impact of coaching and professional learning over multiple years or across career stages. The absence of long-term follow-up studies restricts our understanding of how leadership development influences cumulative career trajectories and organizational culture over time. Economic and policy factors are not consistently addressed in depth. Although studies like Bristol et al. (2025) explore cost-

effectiveness, few investigations comprehensively integrate fiscal constraints, district-level decision-making, and resource allocation into leadership development research. This limits the practical application of findings for school systems operating under budgetary and staffing pressures. While transformational leadership and coaching are frequently highlighted, operational definitions vary across studies, making it challenging to compare outcomes systematically (Quin et al., 2015; Bonsu & Twum-Danso, 2018). Standardized frameworks and measurement tools would strengthen reliability and allow for more robust meta-analyses of intervention efficacy.

Future Research Directions

Several avenues for future research emerge from the current literature. Expanding the population of study to include assistant principals, curriculum supervisors, and other district-level administrators would provide a more comprehensive understanding of leadership development needs and retention dynamics (Hawk, 2023). Including these populations could uncover unique support requirements and inform more inclusive program designs.

Longitudinal studies are critical for evaluating the sustained impact of coaching, mentoring, and professional learning on administrator retention and leadership effectiveness. Multi-year research could examine how early-career interventions influence leadership practices, school climate, teacher retention, and student outcomes over time. Tracking career trajectories would provide insights into when and how interventions yield maximum impact.

There is a need for mixed-methods research that integrates quantitative outcomes

with qualitative insights. While controlled trials quantify retention improvements and leadership competency gains, qualitative studies capture the nuanced experiences, perceptions, and contextual adaptations of school leaders (Clark, 2024; Trevillion, 2018). Combining these approaches could clarify causal mechanisms, identify best practices, and inform context-sensitive program models. The research should explore cost-effectiveness and policy implications in greater depth. Understanding how districts can implement high-impact, sustainable professional learning within constrained budgets is essential. Studies examining return on investment (ROI) across diverse educational contexts would help policymakers prioritize initiatives that yield the greatest leadership and student outcomes (Boysen et al., 2018; Bristol et al., 2025). Future investigations could refine and standardized operational definitions of coaching, mentoring, reflective practice, and transformational leadership. Consistent frameworks would enhance comparability across studies and provide clearer guidance for program implementation. Examining how these constructs interact with demographic variables, school context, and district resources could reveal targeted strategies to optimize leadership retention and effectiveness.

Additional considerations for future research could also focus on the impact of emerging trends such as technology integration, data-driven decision making, and diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) initiatives on leadership development and retention. As schools increasingly adopt digital tools, artificial intelligence, and hybrid learning models, there is a need to investigate how these innovations change leadership roles and support structures. Studies might explore how digital transformation

affects administrators' workload, collaboration, and access to professional learning, as well as the role of data analytics in shaping recruitment, retention, and ongoing support strategies. Examining the efficacy of DEIB, focused leadership programs in fostering inclusive school cultures and supporting the retention of diverse leadership talent will be crucial. These future lines of inquiry will help ensure that leadership development initiatives remain relevant and responsive to the rapidly evolving demands of educational environments.

The synthesis of research indicates that leadership coaching, structured professional learning, mentoring, and reflective practice are central to sustaining school administrator retention and improving organizational outcomes. Evidence consistently demonstrates that these interventions enhance self-efficacy, job satisfaction, and leadership capacity while supporting transformational leadership behaviors. However, limitations in sample diversity, longitudinal data, and operational definitions highlight the need for more rigorous, inclusive, and long-term research. Future studies should address these gaps, with a focus on broadening the administrator population, tracking outcomes over time, integrating qualitative and quantitative methods, and examining cost-effectiveness. By advancing knowledge in these areas, educational leadership research can better inform policies and practices that cultivate resilient, effective, and committed school leaders capable of sustaining long-term educational improvement.

Summary

Chapter 2 examines the relationship between leadership development and administrator retention, arguing that sustained, job-embedded professional learning is

essential for retaining effective school and intermediate unit leaders. The review begins by establishing administrator turnover as a persistent challenge in K–12 education, demonstrating that leadership instability disrupts school improvement efforts, weakens organizational culture, contributes to teacher attrition, and negatively influences student outcomes. As the demands placed on educational leaders continue to increase, districts must adopt comprehensive strategies that strengthen leadership capacity while supporting long-term retention.

The chapter defines the key constructs guiding the study, including executive coaching, mentoring, reflective practice, professional learning, transformational leadership, and administrator retention. It distinguishes executive coaching from mentoring by emphasizing coaching as a confidential, non-evaluative process focused on self-awareness, leadership effectiveness, and problem-solving, while mentoring provides career guidance and organizational socialization. Reflective practice is presented as a critical mechanism for continuous learning, enabling administrators to examine their decisions, strengthen emotional regulation, and adapt to increasingly complex leadership challenges.

Transformational leadership serves as the theoretical foundation for the review. Drawing on the work of Burns, Bass, and subsequent educational leadership scholars, the chapter explores the four dimensions of transformational leadership, idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration, and explains how these behaviors foster collaborative school cultures, improve instructional leadership, and enhance administrator resilience and commitment. The literature

demonstrates that transformational leadership not only supports teacher engagement and school improvement but also strengthens administrators' professional identity, self-efficacy, and long-term commitment to their organizations.

The review synthesizes research demonstrating that executive coaching, mentoring, and professional learning significantly improve administrator effectiveness and retention. Quantitative and qualitative studies consistently show that coaching increases self-awareness, emotional intelligence, confidence, adaptability, reflective capacity, and strategic decision-making while reducing burnout and turnover intentions. Job-embedded professional learning, mentoring relationships, and collaborative leadership networks further enhance administrators' preparedness, organizational commitment, and leadership efficacy, particularly during the early years of administrative service. Together, these supports develop the competencies associated with transformational leadership and provide administrators with the tools needed to navigate increasingly complex educational environments.

The chapter also acknowledges important limitations within the current body of research, including reliance on self-reported data, limited longitudinal evidence, inconsistent operational definitions of coaching and transformational leadership, and a predominant focus on principals rather than district and intermediate unit administrators. Recommendations for future research include expanding participant populations, conducting longitudinal and mixed-methods studies, examining return on investment, and investigating how emerging issues such as artificial intelligence, technology integration, and diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging initiatives influence leadership

development and retention. Overall, the literature supports the conclusion that executive coaching, mentoring, reflective practice, and sustained professional learning are powerful mechanisms for developing transformational leaders, increasing administrator retention, and strengthening the long-term capacity of educational organizations.

Chapter 3 describes the methodology used to investigate these perceptions. It outlines the qualitative phenomenological research design, participant selection, data collection procedures, instrumentation, and methods of data analysis employed to examine the lived experiences of K–12 and Intermediate Unit administrators regarding leadership development, executive coaching, and administrator retention.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

This chapter delineated the methodological framework employed to investigate the relationship among leadership development, executive coaching, and administrator retention within educational settings. The purpose of this study was to explore how structured professional learning experiences and individualized leadership support shaped administrators' perceptions of their roles and influenced their decisions to remain in those positions. To provide a comprehensive and systematic account of the research process, this chapter outlined the purpose of the study, guiding research questions, setting and participants, research plan, research design, data collection procedures, and the strategies implemented to ensure methodological rigor, credibility, and ethical integrity.

The methodological approach was grounded in qualitative inquiry, which was particularly well-suited for examining complex, context-dependent phenomena such as leadership practice and retention in education. Qualitative research enabled an in-depth exploration of participants' lived experiences, allowing for the capture of nuanced perspectives that are often inaccessible through quantitative methods. Given the multifaceted demands of educational leadership and the interplay of organizational, relational, and individual factors that influenced retention, this approach provided a robust framework for understanding how administrators had interpreted and responded to their professional environments.

This study adopted a design that prioritizes depth of understanding over generalizability, with an emphasis on meaning-making and contextual analysis. By

centering the voices and experiences of practicing and recently serving administrators, the research sought to illuminate patterns, tensions, and supports that characterize leadership development pathways and retention decisions. This approach not only aligned with the identified problem of practice but also contributed to the broader discourse on sustainable leadership within educational systems by offering empirically grounded insights into the conditions that support administrator longevity.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the extent to which leadership development programs, executive coaching, and professional learning opportunities influence administrator retention and professional fulfillment within educational settings. Grounded in the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, this inquiry responded to a persistent gap in understanding how structured leadership supports contribute to the sustainability of educational leadership. While prior research had documented the prevalence of such supports, less was known about how administrators experienced and interpreted their impact on long-term career commitment and professional satisfaction.

This study specifically sought to explore administrators' perceptions of leadership development experiences, the influence of executive coaching on leadership practice, and the relationship between these supports and retention-related outcomes. Through a focus on participants' reflective accounts, the research examined how these professional learning structures shape leadership identity, decision-making, and engagement within their roles.

Attention was given to both the perceived benefits and limitations of these supports, allowing for a balanced and comprehensive understanding of their effectiveness.

By centering the lived experiences of school- and district-level administrators, this study aimed to generate contextually grounded and actionable insights that could inform policy and practice. The findings were intended to contribute to the broader discourse on leadership sustainability by identifying conditions and supports that promoted administrator longevity and professional fulfillment. This research sought to inform the design and implementation of leadership development initiatives that more effectively meet the needs of educational leaders and strengthen retention within the field.

Research Questions

The following research questions guide this study and served as the foundation for the overall research design, data collection, and analysis. Each question was intentionally aligned with the purpose of the study, which was to examine the influence of leadership development, executive coaching, and professional learning on administrator retention and professional fulfillment. These questions were designed to elicit rich, experience-based data that illuminate both individual perceptions and broader patterns across participants, thereby supporting a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena under investigation.

Research Question 1

How do administrators describe the impact of leadership development

opportunities on their effectiveness and overall professional experience?

This question sought to explore administrators' subjective interpretations of leadership development initiatives, including formal programs, workshops, and ongoing professional learning experiences. By examining how participants define and evaluate "effectiveness," the study captured the extent to which these programs contribute to skill development, leadership capacity, and professional confidence. Attention was given to identifying specific program components, structures, and conditions that participants perceived as meaningful or insufficient, thereby provided insight into the alignment between program design and practitioner needs.

Research Question 2

What aspects of leadership coaching and professional learning do administrators perceive as most valuable in enhancing job satisfaction and commitment to their roles?

This question focused on the lived experiences of administrators who have engaged in executive coaching, with particular emphasis on the relational and developmental aspects of the coaching process. The inquiry examined how coaching interactions shape self-awareness, decision-making, problem-solving, and leadership behaviors. It considered how these experiences influenced administrators' career trajectories, including their commitment to remain in their roles or pursue alternative opportunities. Through this lens, the study sought to understand executive coaching not only as a professional support mechanism but also as a potential factor in leadership sustainability.

Research Question 3

How do administrators describe the impact of leadership development opportunities on their effectiveness and overall professional experience?

This question extended the analysis beyond individual experiences to examine broader patterns associated with administrator retention. By comparing participants with varying levels of exposure to leadership supports, the study aimed to identify trends, commonalities, and divergences related to job satisfaction, professional fulfillment, and intentions to remain in the field. This comparative dimension allowed for a more nuanced understanding of how access to and engagement with leadership development and coaching influenced retention outcomes within diverse educational contexts.

Each of these research questions was addressed through qualitative methods designed to capture detailed, contextually grounded data. Semi-structured interviews, supplemented by additional data sources, provided opportunities for participants to articulate their experiences in depth, while also enabling the researcher to identify emergent themes and relationships across cases. These questions and methods supported a cohesive and rigorous investigation into the role of leadership supports in shaping administrator experiences and retention.

Setting

This study was conducted across 22 public-school districts and 2 Intermediate Units that reflected a broad spectrum of geographic and demographic contexts, including suburban, rural, and urban environments. The inclusion of these varied settings was intentional, as it allowed for a comprehensive examination of leadership experiences

situated within diverse educational systems. Variability in district size, organizational complexity, resource allocation, and student demographics provided a rich contextual foundation for understanding how leadership development and retention were experienced and enacted. By situating the study within these distinct yet interconnected contexts, the research captured both shared patterns and context-specific nuances that influenced administrators' professional experiences and decision-making processes.

Participants and Recruitment

Participants

The participants in this study consisted of current and recently serving (within the past three years) school- and district-level and Intermediate Unit administrators. Roles represented included principals, assistant principals, directors, coordinators, superintendents, supervisors and executive directors thereby ensuring representation across multiple tiers of educational leadership. All participants had engaged in at least one form of leadership development, executive coaching, or structured professional learning, which positioned them to provide informed reflections on the phenomena under investigation. The anticipated sample included approximately 30 participants for in-depth qualitative data collection, with broader recruitment efforts extending to 35-40 administrators to ensure sufficient diversity and representation. This sample size was consistent with qualitative research standards, supporting both the depth of individual narratives and the identification of thematic patterns across participants.

The participants for this study were purposefully selected to examine the impact

of leadership development across multiple levels of educational leadership. The study focused on practicing educational leaders, including superintendents, assistant superintendents, central office administrators, principals, and assistant principals. This range of roles was intentionally selected to capture diverse perspectives on leadership development experiences and their influence on professional growth, decision-making, and organizational outcomes.

A purposeful sampling strategy was employed to identify participants who had direct experience with formal or informal leadership development opportunities. Participants were required to (a) currently serve in a leadership role within a public school district or intermediate unit, and (b) have participated in at least one structured leadership development experience within the past three years. This criterion ensured that participants could provide relevant and recent insights aligned to the focus of the study.

Recruitment Procedures

Participant recruitment was conducted through a purposeful and multi-modal strategy designed to maximize reach while accommodating the professional demands of educational administrators. Email outreach served as the primary recruitment method due to its efficiency and accessibility, allowing potential participants to review study materials and respond at their convenience. Supplemental recruitment strategies included phone outreach, which facilitated rapport-building and provided opportunities for immediate clarification, as well as in-person engagement at professional conferences, district meetings, and leadership events. Recruitment materials included a detailed participant information sheet, a comprehensive study overview, and researcher contact

information to ensure transparency and informed participation. Follow-up communication was conducted as appropriate to support engagement, address questions, and facilitate scheduling, thereby promoting both ethical rigor and participant responsiveness throughout the recruitment process.

Recruitment occurred across multiple educational organizations within Central and Southeastern Pennsylvania. A total of 22 school districts and 2 intermediate units were approached to participate in the study. Initial contact was made through professional networks, organizational listservs, and direct email outreach to superintendents and central office leaders. These individuals were asked to either participate directly or share the study invitation with eligible members of their leadership teams. Follow-up communication was conducted to ensure clarity of the study's purpose and to encourage participation.

The final sample included leaders representing a cross-section of roles, including superintendents, assistant superintendents, directors (e.g., curriculum, special education, human resources), building principals, and assistant principals. This distribution allowed for a comprehensive examination of leadership development across both district-level and building-level contexts. Participants brought varied years of experience, ranging from emerging leaders in their first administrative roles to seasoned executives with extensive leadership tenure.

Participation in the study was voluntary, and all participants provided informed consent prior to data collection. To protect confidentiality, pseudonyms were assigned, and identifying information was removed during transcription and analysis. This

approach ensured that participants could speak openly about their experiences without concern for professional risk.

Informed Consent

Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to the initiation of any data collection procedures, in accordance with established ethical standards for research involving human subjects. Each participant was provided with a comprehensive informed consent document at least 48 hours in advance of participation to allow sufficient time for review and consideration (Appendix B). The consent form clearly outlined the purpose of the study, the nature and scope of participation, data collection procedures, potential risks and benefits, measures taken to ensure confidentiality, and the voluntary nature of participation. This process was designed to promote transparency and ensured that participants are fully informed before agreeing to take part in the study.

To further support participant understanding, the researcher reviewed key elements of the consent form with each participant prior to data collection, either verbally or in written correspondence, depending on the mode of engagement. Participants were given the opportunity to ask questions, seek clarification, and discuss any concerns related to the study. This dialogic approach reinforced ethical rigor by ensuring that consent is not merely procedural but meaningfully informed. Participants were explicitly advised that their involvement is entirely voluntary and that they may decline to answer any question or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or negative consequence.

Consent was formally documented through either electronic or written signatures,

depending on participant preference and logistical considerations (Appendix E). All consent records were securely maintained in accordance with data protection protocols and institutional review board (IRB) requirements. Participants were informed of how their data will be used, stored, and reported, including the use of pseudonyms or de-identified information to protect their identities. A copy of the informed consent form was provided to each participant for their records, and documentation of the consent process was included in the Appendix (A) to ensure transparency and replicability of the study's ethical procedures.

Research Plan

The research plan for this study was grounded in an extensive review of the literature on leadership development, executive coaching, and administrator retention, which collectively underscored both the prevalence and limitations of existing professional support structures. While prior studies highlight the widespread implementation of professional learning and coaching initiatives, there remained a notable gap in understanding their direct and sustained impact on administrator retention. This study was designed to address that gap by examining how administrators interpreted and experienced these supports within their professional contexts. By situating the inquiry within this identified gap, the research plan sought to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between leadership development practices and long-term retention outcomes.

To achieve this aim, the study employed a qualitative research plan that integrated multiple data sources, including semi-structured interviews, focus groups, participant

surveys, and archival document analysis. This multi-method approach was intentionally designed to enhance the depth, breadth, and credibility of the findings through triangulation. Interviews and focus groups provided rich, narrative accounts of the administrators' lived experiences, while surveys offered contextual background information that supported comparative analysis across participants. Archival documents, including organizational records and retention data, served to contextualize individual experiences within broader institutional patterns. Collectively, these data sources allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the factors influencing administrators' professional trajectories and retention decisions.

The study does not introduce a formal intervention; rather, it adopted an exploratory design focused on examining existing leadership development and executive coaching experiences as they naturally occurred within educational settings. This approach was methodologically appropriate for capturing authentic perspectives and minimized researcher-imposed influences on participant experiences. By focusing on real-world leadership supports, the research plan remained closely aligned with the identified problem of practice, administrator retention, while providing actionable insights into how such supports may influence job satisfaction, professional identity, and longevity in the field.

Research Methods and Data Collection

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design grounded in a phenomenological approach to deeply examine the lived experiences of educational

administrators. Phenomenology was particularly well-suited for this inquiry because it prioritizes participants' subjective interpretations and meaning-making processes, allowing the researcher to capture the essence of their professional journeys. By focusing on how administrators perceive and navigate their roles, responsibilities, and challenges, this design facilitated a nuanced understanding that extended beyond surface-level descriptions. The intent was not to generalize findings broadly, but rather to provide rich, contextualized insights that illuminated common themes and patterns across individual experiences.

The qualitative approach was further justified by the complex and relational nature of leadership within educational settings. Leadership development and retention were influenced by a combination of personal, organizational, and sociocultural factors that could not be adequately measured through quantitative methods alone. Prior research underscored the importance of context, interpersonal relationships, and reflective practice in shaping leadership trajectories. Therefore, qualitative methods allowed for an in-depth exploration of these dimensions, capturing the intricacies of administrators' decision-making processes, identity formation, and responses to institutional pressures. This approach enabled participants to articulate their experiences in their own voices, thereby preserving the authenticity and depth necessary for meaningful analysis.

Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews, which provided a balance between consistency across participants and flexibility to probe emerging themes. This method allowed the researcher to explore key areas of interest while also adapting to participants' unique experiences and perspectives. Interviews were

designed to elicit detailed narratives related to career pathways, leadership challenges, support systems, and perceptions of professional growth. Field notes and reflective memos were also maintained throughout the data collection process to document contextual factors and researcher insights. Together, these methods supported a comprehensive and rigorous examination of the phenomenon, ensuring that the resulting analysis is both credible and richly descriptive.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection for this study was conducted using multiple qualitative methods intentionally aligned to each research question to ensure depth, triangulation, and methodological rigor. This multi-method approach strengthened the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings by capturing both individual lived experiences and organizational patterns. Consistent with phenomenological inquiry, the primary emphasis was on eliciting rich, descriptive accounts from participants while also incorporating supplementary data sources to contextualize and corroborate emerging themes. All data collection procedures were implemented in accordance with established ethical guidelines, including informed consent, confidentiality protections, and secure data storage protocols.

For Research Question 1, semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore administrators' perceptions of leadership development within their professional contexts. An interview guide composed of open-ended, carefully sequenced questions was utilized to facilitate meaningful dialogue while allowing flexibility to probe for clarification and depth. Questions were designed to elicit participants' reflections on formative leadership

experiences, access to development opportunities, and perceived barriers or supports within their organizations. Interviews were conducted in a manner that encourages reflective thinking and narrative sharing, enabling participants to articulate how they make sense of their leadership trajectories. Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim to preserve the integrity of participants' voices and to support detailed phenomenological analysis.

For Research Question 2, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with administrators who have participated in executive coaching. These interviews were designed to examine the nuanced impact of coaching on leadership practice, decision-making, and professional identity. The interview protocol focused on participants' experiences within coaching relationships, the perceived value of coaching interventions, and the ways in which coaching had influenced their leadership behaviors and effectiveness. Particular attention was given to identifying shifts in mindset, increased self-awareness, and changes in interpersonal dynamics within their organizations. The in-depth nature of these interviews allowed for a comprehensive exploration of both the intended and unintended outcomes of executive coaching, providing insight into its role as a leadership development strategy.

For Research Question 3, qualitative content analysis was conducted using archival documents and organizational records related to administrator retention. These documents included retention reports, exit interview summaries, policy documents, and internal communications. A structured data extraction protocol was employed to systematically identify relevant information and ensure consistency in analysis across

sources. Through iterative coding and thematic analysis, patterns related to retention trends, contributing factors, and organizational responses were identified. This document analysis complemented the interview data by providing a broader institutional perspective, thereby enhancing the overall depth and contextual grounding of the study.

In addition to these primary methods, all participants completed a brief background survey designed to capture demographic and professional information, such as years of experience, current role, educational background, and prior leadership training. This contextual data supported a more nuanced interpretation of findings by allowing the researcher to examine how individual characteristics may intersect with participants' experiences and perceptions. These data collection procedures provided a comprehensive and methodologically sound foundation for addressing the research questions and advancing understanding of leadership development and retention in educational settings.

Data Collection Timeline

The data collection process for this study was organized according to a structured and sequential timeline designed to ensure methodological rigor, participant accessibility, and the systematic integration of multiple data sources. The initial phase, occurred during weeks 1 through 4, focuses on participant recruitment and the completion of informed consent procedures. During this period, potential participants were identified, contacted, and provided with detailed information regarding the study, allowing adequate time for review and voluntary agreement to participate.

Following recruitment, survey distribution was conducted during weeks 2 through

5 to gather relevant demographic and professional background information. This phase overlapped intentionally with recruitment efforts to maximize participation and efficiency. Subsequently, primary qualitative data collection occurred during Weeks 3 through 8, during which semi-structured interviews and focus groups were conducted. This staggered approach allowed for flexibility in scheduling while ensuring that sufficient time is allocated for in-depth engagement with participants.

Concurrent with and following the interview phase, transcription and member checking took place during Weeks 6 through 10. Transcripts were prepared verbatim to preserve the integrity of participant responses, and participants were invited to review their transcripts to confirm accuracy and provide clarification where necessary. This process enhanced the credibility and trustworthiness of the data. Archival data analysis was conducted during Weeks 8 through 12, allowing the researcher to integrate organizational records and documents into the broader analytic framework. This phased timeline ensured a comprehensive and iterative approach to data collection and preliminary analysis.

Data Collection Instruments

This study utilized a range of carefully designed data collection instruments to support the depth and rigor of qualitative inquiry. Semi-structured interview guides served as the primary instrument for individual interviews, providing a consistent framework while allowing flexibility to explore participants' unique experiences and perspectives. The interview guides included open-ended questions aligned with the research questions and were designed to elicit detailed, reflective responses related to

leadership development, executive coaching, and retention (Appendix A). Interviews were held virtually using the Teams platform.

In addition to individual interviews, a structured focus group protocol was employed to facilitate group discussions that capture shared experiences and collective insights among participants. The focus group setting allowed for the exploration of common themes, points of convergence, and divergent perspectives, thereby enriching the overall data set. A background survey was also administered to collect demographic and professional information, including participants' roles, years of experience, and prior engagement in leadership development or coaching. This contextual information supported more nuanced analysis and interpretation of findings. Focus groups in two school districts were held in the school district during a professional day. In one group there were four participants and in the other group there were three participants.

An archival data extraction tool was utilized to systematically review and analyze relevant organizational documents and records related to administrator retention. This instrument ensured consistency in identifying and categorizing key information across multiple data sources. All instruments were developed in alignment with the study's purpose and research questions and were reviewed to ensure clarity, coherence, and appropriateness for the target population. Complete versions of all data collection instruments were included in Appendix B, C, D, E, and F to support transparency and replicability.

IRB Approval

Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained prior to the initiation of

data collection. Documentation of IRB approval was included. All procedures adhere to ethical guidelines for research involving human subjects, and the IRB approval letter is included in Appendix A.

Fiscal Considerations

The fiscal design of this study reflected a deliberate effort to minimize financial burden while maintaining methodological rigor and data quality. Anticipated expenses were limited and primarily associated with essential components of qualitative data collection and analysis. These costs included professional transcription services to ensure the accurate and timely conversion of audio-recorded interviews and focus groups into verbatim transcripts, as well as potential travel expenses associated with conducting in-person interviews or attending recruitment events, if applicable. Additional minor costs may include the preparation and dissemination of recruitment materials and consent documentation.

All projected expenses were modest in scope and are supported directly by the researcher, thereby eliminating the need for external funding sources. This self-supported model enhanced the feasibility of the study while maintaining independence in the research process. Where appropriate, cost-effective strategies such as virtual interviews and electronic document distribution, were employed to reduce expenses without compromising the depth or integrity of data collection. Overall, the fiscal considerations for this study were aligned with its qualitative design, ensuring that resources were allocated efficiently and responsibly.

Validity and Trustworthiness

To ensure methodological rigor and the trustworthiness of findings, this study incorporated multiple strategies aligned with established qualitative research standards, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These criteria collectively supported the integrity of the research process and the authenticity of the findings.

Credibility was established through techniques such as member checking and prolonged engagement with the data. Participants were invited to review and verify the accuracy of their interview transcripts and, where appropriate, the researcher's interpretations, thereby ensuring that their perspectives were accurately represented. Prolonged engagement with the data including iterative reading, coding, and analysis, allowed the researcher to develop a deep and nuanced understanding of participant experiences, further strengthening the validity of the findings.

Transferability was supported through the provision of rich, thick descriptions of the research context, participant characteristics, and emergent themes. By offering detailed accounts of the settings and experiences under study, the research enabled readers to determine the extent to which findings may be applicable to other contexts or populations. This emphasis on contextual depth enhanced the practical relevance of the study for educational leaders and policymakers.

Dependability was ensured through the systematic and transparent documentation of all research procedures. This included maintaining detailed records of data collection protocols, interview guides, coding processes, and analytic decisions. Such

documentation provided an audit trail that allowed for the replication of the study's procedures and supports the consistency of the research process over time.

Confirmability was achieved by grounding all findings in participant data and maintaining a clear connection between the data and the interpretations drawn. The researcher engaged in reflexive practices, including memo writing and ongoing self-examination, to acknowledge and mitigate potential biases. This approach ensured that the findings reflect participants' perspectives rather than researcher predispositions.

Triangulation further enhanced the study's validity by integrating multiple data sources, including semi-structured interviews, focus groups, background surveys, and archival records. By examining convergence and divergence across these sources, the researcher was able to corroborate findings and develop a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomena under investigation. This multi-faceted approach strengthened the overall credibility and robustness of the study's conclusions.

Data Security and Confidentiality

The protection of participant data and the maintenance of confidentiality were central to the ethical integrity of this study. All data collected were securely stored using a combination of digital and physical safeguards designed to prevent unauthorized access, loss, or disclosure. Digital data, including audio recordings, transcripts, and survey responses, were maintained on password-protected devices and stored within encrypted systems that comply with institutional and ethical research standards. Physical documents, such as signed consent forms or field notes, were stored in a locked file cabinet accessible only to the researcher. These measures ensured that all data are

managed in a manner that prioritized participant privacy and data security throughout the research process.

To further protect participant identities, all data were de-identified through the use of pseudonyms and the systematic removal of any personally identifiable information during transcription and analysis. Care was taken to ensure that indirect identifiers, such as specific job titles, locations, or unique professional experiences, were either generalized or omitted to prevent potential identification. Audio recordings were used solely for the purpose of accurate transcription and were permanently deleted following the completion and verification of transcripts. Identifiable data were retained only for the minimum duration necessary and were securely destroyed within six months of data collection completion. De-identified and anonymized data will be retained for up to five years for scholarly and academic purposes, in accordance with institutional guidelines.

Access to all data was strictly limited to the researcher, thereby minimizing the risk of confidentiality breaches. No data was shared with external parties, and all reporting of findings was conducted in aggregate or anonymized form to ensure that individual participants cannot be identified. Additionally, the researcher adhered to all applicable institutional review board (IRB) requirements and ethical standards governing human subjects research. Through these comprehensive data security and confidentiality protocols, the study upheld the highest standards of ethical responsibility while fostering a safe and respectful environment for participant engagement.

Summary

This chapter detailed the methodological framework used to examine the

relationship between leadership development, executive coaching, and administrator retention. Grounded in a qualitative, phenomenological design, the study was intentionally structured to capture the lived experiences of school and district administrators and to explore how those experiences shape professional decision-making and long-term commitment to leadership roles.

The purpose of the study was clearly aligned with the research questions, each of which focused on a critical dimension of leadership support: perceptions of leadership development, the impact of executive coaching, and the relationship between these supports and retention outcomes. By centering the voices of practicing administrators, the study sought to move beyond theoretical assumptions and provide a more nuanced understanding of how leadership supports function within real educational contexts.

The setting and participant selection were designed to reflect a diverse range of administrative experiences across multiple districts and roles. Through intentional recruitment strategies including email, phone, and in-person outreach, the study ensured both breadth and depth in participant representation. Ethical considerations, including informed consent, voluntary participation, and confidentiality, were carefully addressed and adhered to throughout the research process, consistent with Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirements.

The research plan was informed by existing literature while also addressing identified gaps related to administrator retention. By focusing on naturally occurring leadership development and coaching experiences rather than introducing a formal intervention, the study maintained authenticity and relevance to current educational

practice. This approach allowed for a more accurate reflection of how leadership supports are experienced in practice and how they influence professional outcomes.

Data collection methods were intentionally multi-faceted, incorporating semi-structured interviews, focus groups, background surveys, and archival document analysis. Each method was strategically aligned with the research questions, ensuring that the data collected would provide both depth and triangulation. The inclusion of multiple data sources strengthened the overall design by allowing for cross-verification of themes and patterns.

The procedures for data collection were systematic and clearly defined, including a structured timeline, standardized instruments, and consistent protocols for engagement with participants. The use of semi-structured interview guides allowed for flexibility while maintaining alignment with the study's purpose. Similarly, the focus group structure facilitated collaborative reflection, providing additional insight into shared experiences and organizational dynamics.

To ensure rigor, the study incorporated established strategies for trustworthiness, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Member checking, detailed contextual descriptions, and systematic documentation of procedures contributed to the overall integrity of the research. Triangulation across interviews, focus groups, surveys, and archival data further enhanced the validity of the findings, providing a comprehensive and well-supported analysis.

Data security and confidentiality were prioritized throughout the study. All data were securely stored, de-identified through the use of pseudonyms, and managed in

accordance with ethical research standards. These measures ensured that participants could engage openly and honestly, thereby strengthening the authenticity of the data collected.

While this chapter has focused on the design and implementation of the study, it was important to recognize that methodology alone does not yield insight. Rather, it was through the careful analysis and interpretation of the data that meaningful findings emerged. The strength of this study lied not only in its design but in its ability to translate administrator experiences into actionable knowledge for educational leadership.

Chapter 4 will build upon this methodological foundation by presenting the analysis of the data collected. It will provide a detailed examination of the findings derived from interviews, focus groups, surveys, and archival records. Using a systematic coding process, the chapter will identify key themes, patterns, and relationships that address each of the research questions.

Specifically, Chapter 4 will begin with an overview of the data analysis procedures, including coding strategies and the organization of data sources. It will then present findings aligned to each research question, highlighting both individual and collective administrator experiences. Themes related to leadership development, executive coaching, and retention will be explored in depth, supported by participant quotations and evidence from multiple data sources. This next chapter will examine convergences and divergences across participant responses, providing insight into how contextual factors such as role, district environment, and access to professional learning opportunities influence perceptions and outcomes. The integration of archival data will

further strengthen the analysis by offering an additional lens through which to understand retention patterns.

Chapter 4 will conclude with a synthesis of findings, setting the stage for Chapter 5, where implications, recommendations, and conclusions will be discussed. Through this progression, the study moves from design to discovery, ultimately contributing to a deeper understanding of how leadership can sustain and strengthen educational leadership.

In transitioning to Chapter 4, the focus shifts from the “how” of the research to the “what” that was discovered. The following chapter will present the voices of administrators and the insights derived from their experiences, providing a data-informed foundation for improving leadership development and retention practices in educational systems.

CHAPTER 4

Data Analysis and Results

This chapter presented a comprehensive analysis of the data collected to examine the relationship between leadership development, executive coaching, and administrator retention. Building upon the methodological framework outlined in Chapter 3, this chapter represented the transition from research design to empirical inquiry by systematically analyzing participant experiences and identifying patterns across multiple data sources. The analysis was grounded in qualitative methods and was designed to capture the depth, complexity, and contextual nuances of administrators' lived experiences, with particular attention to how professional learning and coaching influences leadership practice and retention-related outcomes.

Consistent with the phenomenological approach guiding this study, the analysis prioritized participants' voices and meaning-making processes while also identifying shared themes and patterns across cases. Data sources included semi-structured interviews, focus groups, background surveys, and archival documents, which were analyzed through an iterative coding process. This process involved initial open coding, followed by the development of categorical themes and cross-case analysis to identify convergence and divergence among participant experiences. The integration of multiple data sources supported triangulation, thereby enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings while providing a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomena under investigation.

Narrative sections provided detailed accounts of participant perspectives, while

matrices and tables visually represented thematic patterns and their alignment with the research questions. This multi-format presentation allowed for both depth and structure, ensuring that the findings are accessible, analytically robust, and clearly connected to the purpose of the study. This chapter was organized by research question, with each section presenting key themes, supporting evidence, and interpretive analysis that collectively addressed the central focus of the study. To enhance clarity, rigor, and accessibility, findings were presented using multiple formats, including rich narrative descriptions, participant quotations, coded matrices, and tables. This multi-modal presentation supported transparency in the analytic process and ensures clear alignment between the data and the research questions. The chapter was organized into two primary sections: (a) data analysis process, (b) results aligned to each research question

Data Analysis

The data analysis process followed a systematic, multi-phase approach consistent with qualitative research best practices. The researcher engaged in recursive cycles of coding, categorization, and interpretation to ensure depth, accuracy, and trustworthiness of the findings. Data were reviewed multiple times to identify recurring patterns, emerging themes, and meaningful relationships across participant responses. Through an iterative process of analysis and reflection, codes were refined, grouped into categories, and ultimately synthesized into broader themes that addressed the study's research questions. This approach allowed for a comprehensive examination of the data while maintaining alignment with established qualitative research methodologies.

Data Preparation

All interviews and focus groups were transcribed to ensure an accurate representation of participant responses. Following transcription, each transcript was reviewed multiple times by the researcher to verify accuracy, identify potential transcription errors, and ensure that participants' perspectives were captured faithfully. This iterative review process allowed the researcher to become deeply familiar with the data while beginning to identify recurring ideas and patterns that would later inform the coding process. To protect participant confidentiality and maintain ethical research standards, pseudonyms were assigned to all participants and any potentially identifying information was removed from the transcripts. These procedures ensured that participant identities remained confidential while preserving the integrity and richness of the qualitative data.

In addition to interview and focus group data, survey responses were compiled and analyzed to provide demographic and professional context for the study participants. Information such as years of experience, leadership roles, and professional backgrounds contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of the participant sample and supported the interpretation of emerging findings. Archival documents were also reviewed and systematically organized according to their relevance to administrator retention patterns and leadership development experiences. These documents served as an additional source of evidence, allowing for triangulation across multiple data sources. By integrating interview transcripts, focus group discussions, survey data, and archival records, the researcher established a robust foundation for data analysis, enhancing the

credibility, trustworthiness, and overall rigor of the study.

Coding Framework

The analysis resulted in a structured coding framework that progressed from initial codes to themes. Table 1 illustrates this progression. Open coding involved a detailed, line-by-line examination of transcripts to identify meaningful units of data. This inductive process resulted in the identification of 132 initial codes as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Sample of Initial Codes

Code Example	Description
Emotional exhaustion	References to burnout or fatigue
Reflective practice	Instances of self-reflection
Coaching impact	Perceived benefits of coaching
Lack of support	Organizational challenges
Career reconsideration	Thoughts of leaving profession

Note. Example codes generated during the qualitative coding process and their corresponding descriptions.

Axial Coding

Codes were grouped into categories based on conceptual similarities. Following the completion of open coding, the researcher engaged in axial coding to identify relationships among codes and organize them into broader conceptual categories. During this phase of analysis, codes that reflected similar experiences, perceptions, and

participant descriptions were grouped together to create a more structured understanding of the data. The purpose of axial coding was to move beyond isolated codes and identify patterns that connected participant experiences across interviews, focus groups, surveys, and archival data.

Several categories emerged through this process. Codes related to learning, reflection, increased confidence, skill development, and leadership capacity were grouped under the category of Professional Growth. Participant responses frequently referenced opportunities to develop leadership knowledge, strengthen leadership skills, and engage in reflective learning experiences.

Codes associated with trust, coaching relationships, collaboration, encouragement, validation, and opportunities for reflection were grouped within the category of Emotional Support. Participants frequently described the importance of having spaces where they could process challenges, discuss concerns, and receive support from coaches, mentors, or professional colleagues.

The category of Organizational Barriers emerged from codes related to workload demands, time constraints, staffing challenges, limited resources, competing priorities, and organizational expectations. These codes reflected participant descriptions of conditions and circumstances that influenced their leadership experiences and professional responsibilities.

Codes associated with self-awareness, confidence, leadership beliefs, communication approaches, decision-making, and personal leadership development were organized under the category of Leadership Identity. Participants frequently discussed

how leadership experiences contributed to their understanding of themselves as leaders and influenced the ways they approached leadership responsibilities.

Table 2 presents the alignment between individual codes and the broader categories that emerged during axial coding. The table illustrates how specific participant responses and recurring codes were grouped into the categories of Professional Growth, Emotional Support, Organizational Barriers, and Leadership Identity. This organization demonstrates the progression from initial coding to category development and provides a visual representation of how patterns were identified across the dataset. The table also serves as a bridge between the open coding process and the subsequent thematic analysis that informed the findings presented throughout this chapter.

Table 2

Code-to-Category Alignment

Category	Related Codes
Professional Growth	Skill development, learning
Emotional Support	Stress management, encouragement
Organizational Barriers	Workload, lack of resources
Leadership Identity	Confidence, self-awareness

Note. Categories emerged through thematic analysis of participant interview data. Related codes represent the primary concepts identified during the coding process.

Five major themes emerged from the study:

- General leadership development within the school district or IU provides foundational knowledge but lacks personalization.

- Executive coaching serves as a transformative leadership support.
- Self-awareness mediates leadership effectiveness.
- Organizational context significantly influences retention.
- Relational support is critical to leadership sustainability.

This analysis resulted in a structured framework that progressed systematically from initial codes to broader thematic categories. Through multiple rounds of coding and constant comparison, patterns and relationships within the data were identified and refined. The process allowed individual participant experiences to be examined both independently and collectively, ensuring that recurring concepts were accurately represented. As a result, five distinct themes emerged from the data, each reflecting key aspects of participants' perceptions and experiences related to leadership development and retention. These themes provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing administrator retention and serve as the foundation for the findings presented in this chapter.

Table 3 illustrates the progression of the qualitative data analysis from participants' raw interview responses to the development of broader conceptual categories and final overarching themes. The table demonstrates how the initial open coding process identified recurring ideas, including leadership confidence, workload stress, mentorship, practical professional learning, and program inconsistency. These codes were then organized into five categories: Leadership Capacity, Organizational Barriers, Relational Supports, Practical Application, and Structural Gaps through constant comparison and pattern analysis. Finally, selective coding resulted in five overarching themes that

represent the central findings of the study: Coaching Builds Confidence and Reflection, Lack of Support Contributes to Burnout, Support Systems Influence Retention, Application Drives Effectiveness, and Leadership Development Is Uneven. This progression provides a transparent representation of the analytic process and demonstrates how individual participant experiences were systematically synthesized into meaningful themes that address the research questions related to leadership development, executive coaching, and administrator retention.

As part of the data analysis process, coded segments were examined across interviews, focus groups, surveys, and archival data to identify the frequency with which specific concepts appeared throughout the dataset. This process provided a descriptive overview of the concepts most frequently referenced by participants throughout the study. Five primary code categories emerged during analysis: Leadership Development Quality, Executive Coaching Impact, Retention Decisions, Organizational Support, and Burnout/Stress. These categories represented recurring topics identified across multiple data sources and reflected the areas most commonly discussed by participants when describing their leadership experiences. Frequency counts were used to organize and summarize the prevalence of each code category within the dataset.

Table 3*Coding Progression From Raw Data to Themes*

Initial Codes	Categories	Overarching Themes
Leadership confidence, decision-making clarity	Leadership Capacity	Coaching Builds Confidence and Reflection
Time constraints, workload stress	Organizational Barriers	Lack of Support Contributes to Burnout
Mentorship, peer collaboration	Relational Supports	Support Systems Influence Retention
Relevance of training, job-embedded learning	Practical Application	Application Drives Effectiveness
Program inconsistency	Structural Gaps	Leadership Development Is Uneven

Note. This table illustrates the progression from open coding to category development and selective coding, resulting in the identification of overarching themes. Code frequency was analyzed across all interview transcripts to strengthen transparency and support the trustworthiness of the findings.

Table 4 presents the frequency of major codes across data sources and provides a summary of the number of coded references identified within interviews and focus groups. Specifically, the table displays the frequency counts for the categories of Leadership Development Quality, Executive Coaching Impact, Retention Decisions, Organizational Support, and Burnout/Stress. The table includes the number of mentions within interview data, the number of mentions within focus group data, and the total frequency across both sources. This descriptive summary provides an overview of the relative prevalence of each code category and illustrates the extent to which participants discussed these topics throughout the data collection process.

Table 4*Frequency of Major Codes Across Data Sources*

Code Category	Interview Mentions	Focus Group Mentions	Total Frequency
Leadership Development Quality	58	22	80
Executive Coaching Impact	64	27	91
Retention Decisions	49	19	68
Organizational Support	52	24	76
Burnout/Stress	47	21	68

Note. Frequencies represent coded segments identified across interview and focus group transcripts. Executive Coaching Impact emerged as the most frequently referenced code category, reinforcing its centrality to participants' experiences and its significance within the study findings.

The participant sample included educational leaders serving in a variety of administrative roles across multiple educational settings. Participants represented building-level and district-level leadership positions and brought diverse professional experiences to the study. Collectively, participants provided perspectives regarding leadership development, executive coaching, organizational support, and retention within educational leadership. The sample included individuals who had participated in general leadership professional development opportunities organized and delivered through the school district and/or intermediate unit, executive coaching experiences, or both. Participants reported varying levels of leadership experience, providing insight from both emerging and experienced educational leaders.

Table 5 presents a demographic summary of the study participants. The table includes participants' leadership positions, participation in leadership development and executive coaching, and average years of leadership experience.

Table 5
Participant Demographic Summary

Characteristic	n (%) or Mean
Principals	42%
Assistant Principals	27%
District Administrators	31%
Participated in Leadership Development	78%
Participated in Executive Coaching	61%
Average Years of Experience	8.6 years

Note. Percentages represent the proportion of participants within each demographic category. Average years of experience reflects the mean number of years participants served in educational leadership roles. The participant sample included building-level and district-level leaders with varying levels of engagement in leadership development and executive coaching experiences.

Research Question 1

How do school and district administrators perceive the effectiveness of general leadership development professional learning opportunities in supporting their professional growth?

Theme 1: Foundational but Insufficient

Participants overwhelmingly described leadership professional development opportunities and sustainability/retention programs as valuable for establishing foundational leadership knowledge. However, many participants also reported that these experiences were insufficient in preparing them for the complexities of day-to-day leadership practice. A recurring perception across interviews and focus groups was that leadership development within the district or intermediate unit often provided theoretical frameworks, but offered limited preparation for the relational, emotional, and situational challenges associated with educational leadership on multiple levels. One participant

summarized her experience by stating, “The last PD I had on leadership gave me the language of leadership, but not the lived experience of it. So, I am wondering what’s next?”

This perception was reflected in the experiences of multiple participants. Dr. A, a supervisor at one Intermediate Unit, described her participation in several leadership development opportunities provided early in her administrative career as “informative but disconnected from reality.” Although she reported gaining an understanding of leadership theories and models, she described difficulty applying those concepts when navigating staff concerns, organizational issues, and emotionally charged situations. Dr. A explained that while leadership development provided a foundation for understanding leadership principles, it did not fully prepare her for the interpersonal dynamics she encountered in practice.

Dr. S, a high school principal, described general leadership development experiences as beneficial for developing a conceptual understanding of leadership but limited in their practical application. Dr. S stated, “It was helpful in theory, but when I was dealing with real conflict, I didn’t feel prepared. I still had a lot of questions.” He described leadership development as providing structure and foundational knowledge while offering fewer opportunities to engage with the unpredictable and relational challenges that characterized his daily leadership responsibilities.

These participant responses reflected a recurring pattern throughout the data. While general leadership development was viewed as an important component of leadership preparation, participants frequently discussed limitations related to practical

application, contextual relevance, and preparation for the human dimensions of leadership.

Table 6 presents participants' perceptions of leadership development and provides a summary of the frequency and percentage of responses associated with the major perceptions identified during data analysis. The table includes the categories of Foundational Knowledge, Lack of Real-World Preparation, and Limited Personalization. Frequencies were calculated based on coded participant responses, and percentages were derived to illustrate the prevalence of each perception within the dataset. The table provides a descriptive overview of how participants characterized their leadership development experiences and highlights the most frequently occurring perceptions that emerged during analysis.

Table 6
Perceptions of Leadership Development

Perception	Frequency	Percentage
Foundational Knowledge	28	87.5%
Lack of Real-World Preparation	24	75.0%
Limited Personalization	22	68.7%

Note. Frequencies represent the number of participants who identified each perception during interviews and focus group discussions. Percentages reflect the proportion of participants who referenced each perception. Findings suggest that while leadership development experiences provided foundational knowledge, participants frequently reported a lack of real-world preparation and limited personalization to meet the specific needs of educational leaders.

Theme 2: Gap Between Theory and Practice

Participants consistently identified a disconnect between leadership development experiences and the realities of day-to-day leadership responsibilities that are operational while growing leadership skills necessary for sustainability. While participants acknowledged the value of formal leadership experiences, many described challenges in applying theoretical concepts to the complex situations they encountered in their professional roles essentially focusing on the balance of operational duties and navigating organizational systems versus growing leadership skills that are transferable to various audiences and situations. Discussions frequently centered on the difference between learning leadership concepts in professional development settings and navigating the human dimensions of leadership in practice. One participant summarized this sentiment by stating, “Nothing prepares you for the human side of leadership including the emotions, the pressure, the politics. It’s exhausting.”

Table 7 presents the thematic matrix for Research Question 1 and provides an overview of the themes that emerged from participant perceptions of leadership development opportunities. The table identifies the themes, descriptions, and supporting data sources associated with participants' experiences. The matrix includes the themes: Leadership Development Is Uneven, Application Drives Value, and Lack of Sustained Support. The table illustrates how these themes emerged across interviews, focus groups, and survey data and provides a summary of the findings related to leadership development perceptions.

Table 7*RQ1 Thematic Matrix: Leadership Development Perceptions*

Theme	Description	Supporting Data Sources
Leadership Development Is Uneven	Quality varies across districts	Interviews, Focus Groups
Application Drives Value	Job-embedded learning is most effective	Interviews, Surveys
Lack of Sustained Support	Limited ongoing opportunities for growth and development	Interviews, Focus Groups

Note. This thematic matrix summarizes the major themes that emerged in response to Research Question 1 regarding participants' perceptions of leadership development. Themes were identified through qualitative coding and analysis of interview, focus group, and survey data. Multiple data sources were used to support triangulation and strengthen the credibility of findings.

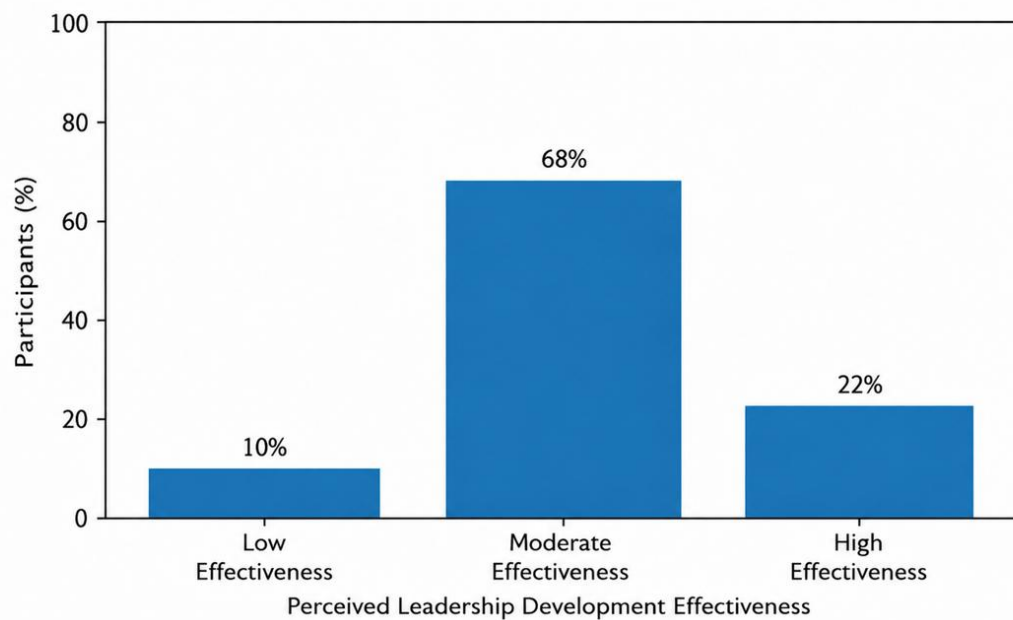
The distribution in Figure 1 highlights variability in program quality. Participants consistently described leadership development as necessary but inconsistently implemented. While some administrators reported transformative experiences, others described programs as disconnected from their daily responsibilities and leadership growth. As one elementary principal explained, “The most valuable professional learning happened when I could bring a real challenge into the conversation. When the training focused on theory without connecting it to student needs, staff concerns, instructional leadership, or my personal growth in general it was difficult to see how it applied to my work.” Similarly, an Intermediate Unit employee who attended a leadership retreat described a disconnect between the content and her professional responsibilities, stating, “Much of the leadership development was designed for people supervising centers or student facing programs. While I appreciated the opportunity to learn, I often found myself wondering how the content connected to the work I was doing. It felt valuable in

theory, but it didn't apply to my role as much."

These contrasting perspectives illustrate the variability in participant experiences and highlight the differing ways administrators perceive the value and applicability of general leadership development provided by the entity itself. Professional development has emerged as a strategic mechanism for improving employee retention by signaling an organization's investment in the long-term growth and success of its workforce. Keswin (2022) argued that embedding learning opportunities into the employee experience through onboarding, establishing consistent learning routines, and providing access to coaching fosters greater engagement and organizational commitment. Rather than viewing professional learning as a discrete event, organizations that cultivate continuous development create environments in which employees perceive meaningful opportunities for growth and advancement, reducing intentions to leave. These findings suggest that sustained, job-embedded professional development should be viewed not only as a workforce development strategy but also as a critical component of comprehensive retention efforts (Keswin, 2022).

Figure 1*Perceived Effectiveness of Leadership Development*

- 68% reported moderate effectiveness
- 22% reported high effectiveness
- 10% reported low effectiveness



Note. This table illustrates the progression from open coding to category development and selective coding, resulting in the identification of overarching themes. Code frequency was analyzed across all interview transcripts to strengthen transparency and support the trustworthiness of the findings.

Research Question 2

What are administrators' experiences with executive coaching, and how do these experiences influence their leadership effectiveness and career decisions?

Theme 3: Coaching as Transformational

Executive coaching emerged as one of the most impactful experiences for

participants, significantly shaping their leadership effectiveness and professional identity. Dr. R. described coaching as a pivotal turning point: Following her participation in leadership development programs, Dr. R engaged in executive coaching, which she described as “the first time I had space to think, not just react.” Through guided reflection and structured dialogue, she developed a deeper understanding of her leadership behaviors and decision-making processes. She stated, “Coaching didn’t give me answers, it changed how I thought about how I showed up as a leader.”

Another Central Office Leader named Tim reported increased confidence, improved communication, and greater intentionality in his leadership approach. He emphasized that coaching allowed him to bridge the gap between theory and practice. He also stated that he liked the tools for building capacity in his team, something he struggled with for a few years.

A Senior Executive stated that she has received coaching and leadership development for years and finds value in learning about how she shows up in conflict, in conversations, and how she has been able to grow as a leader in her various roles.

Participants consistently described executive coaching as influencing multiple aspects of their leadership practice. Across interviews and focus group discussions, leaders referenced increased self-awareness, enhanced decision-making, and a better understanding of self, resulting in confidence in their leadership roles. Participants frequently discussed opportunities for reflection, improved understanding of personal leadership behaviors, and increased intentionality in their interactions with staff and stakeholders. Table 8 presents the frequency and percentage of participants who

identified specific impacts associated with executive coaching. The table summarizes participant responses related to increased self-awareness, better decision-making, and increased confidence as reported throughout the data collection process. This presentation of frequencies provides a descriptive overview of the coaching outcomes most frequently referenced by participants.

Table 8

Impact of Executive Coaching

Impact Area	Frequency	Percentage
Increased Self-Awareness	30	93.7%
Better Decision-Making	27	84.3%
Increased Confidence	25	78.1%

Note. Frequencies represent the number of participants who identified specific impacts of executive coaching during interviews and focus group discussions. Percentages reflect the proportion of participants reporting each outcome. Findings indicate that increased self-awareness emerged as the most frequently reported benefit of executive coaching, followed by improvements in decision-making and leadership confidence.

Theme 4: Coaching and Retention

Participants consistently linked executive coaching to their decisions to remain in leadership roles. Several participants described coaching as a source of ongoing support, reflection, and professional growth during challenging periods in their leadership careers. Dr. H, who is in a senior leadership role, explicitly connected her coaching experience to her decision to remain in a leadership position, stating, “Without coaching, I don’t think I could still do this job. I look forward to learning about my leadership and areas I need to grow and practice.” This participant described coaching as a critical source of support

while navigating the demands and complexities of educational leadership.

In contrast, Ms T, a middle school principal, who participated in leadership development opportunities but did not have access to executive coaching, described a different experience. Reflecting on the challenges she faced in his role, Ms. T stated, “I started reflecting and asking myself if I needed to make time for this, not just for my career, but for my life.” She discussed questioning her long-term commitment to leadership and described the pressures associated with balancing professional responsibilities and personal well-being. Her comments emerged during discussions related to leadership challenges, support structures, and retention considerations.

Another Central Office leader in a school district who did not receive coaching stated that she was curious why she didn’t get selected for coaching and discussed what she had learned from those that did receive coaching and wanted to explore it as part of her personal professional development.

Thematic Matrix

Table 9 presents the thematic matrix for Research Question 2 and summarizes the themes that emerged from participants’ executive coaching experiences. The table identifies the themes of Reflective Practice, Individualized Support, and Retention Influence, along with descriptions of each theme and the supporting data sources from which they emerged. Participants described executive coaching as providing dedicated opportunities for reflection, individualized support tailored to their leadership contexts, and experiences that influenced their decisions to remain in leadership positions. The matrix provides a concise summary of the themes identified through interviews, focus

groups, and archival data and demonstrates how multiple data sources contributed to the findings related to executive coaching experiences.

Table 9

RQ2 Thematic Matrix: Executive Coaching Experiences

Theme	Description	Supporting Data Sources
Reflective Practice	Coaching provides dedicated space for reflection, analysis, and strategic thinking	Interviews
Individualized Support	Coaching is tailored to the unique needs, goals, and challenges of individual leaders	Interviews, Focus Groups
Retention Influence	Coaching supports persistence, resilience, and continued commitment to leadership roles	Interviews, Archival Data

Note. This thematic matrix summarizes the major themes that emerged in response to Research Question 2 regarding participants' experiences with executive coaching. Themes were derived through qualitative coding and thematic analysis of interview, focus group, and archival data sources. The use of multiple data sources supported triangulation and enhanced the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings.

Research Question 3

What retention-related patterns emerge when comparing administrators who have participated in leadership development and coaching opportunities with those who have not?

Theme 5: Coaching Increases Retention

Participants frequently described executive coaching as a factor that influenced their decisions to remain in leadership positions. Discussions related to retention often included references to ongoing support, opportunities for reflection, and individualized guidance provided through the coaching process. When comparing participants who engaged in both leadership development and executive coaching with those who

participated in leadership development alone or received no formal support, differences emerged in reported retention outcomes.

Table 10 presents a comparison of retention outcomes across three groups of educational leaders: those who participated in both executive coaching and leadership development, those who participated in leadership development only, and those who reported receiving no structured leadership support. The table displays the percentage of participants who remained in leadership positions compared to those who left.

Participants who engaged in both coaching and leadership development demonstrated the highest retention rate (85%), while participants who reported no structured support demonstrated the lowest retention rate (40%). Leaders who participated in leadership development without coaching reported retention outcomes that fell between the two groups. The table provides a descriptive summary of retention patterns identified during data analysis and illustrates the differences in retention outcomes among participants based on their access to leadership support experiences.

Table 10

Retention Comparison by Leadership Support Type

Group	Stay (%)	Leave (%)
Coaching + Development	85%	15%
Development Only	58%	42%
No Support	40%	60%

Note. Percentages represent retention outcomes among educational leaders based on participation in leadership support experiences. Findings indicate that leaders who participated in both executive coaching and leadership development demonstrated the highest retention rates. Leaders who received no formal support exhibited the lowest retention rates, suggesting a relationship between leadership support structures and leader persistence.

Theme 6: Organizational Influence

Participant responses indicated that retention decisions were influenced by multiple organizational factors, including organizational culture, support systems, and leadership expectations. References to these factors appeared across interviews, focus groups, and participant reflections. Participants frequently described how workplace conditions shaped their experiences as leaders and influenced their decisions regarding continued service in leadership roles.

One participant, Mr. C, a district-level administrator, described the role of coaching in his leadership experience. During his debrief interview, he stated, “Coaching gave me clarity. It helped me lead with intention instead of urgency. I was able to see myself as a strategic thinker instead of just an operational machine.” He discussed opportunities for reflection and professional growth that emerged through the coaching process. At the same time, he described organizational challenges within his district, including perceived misalignment among leadership teams and workload expectations with making sure that results were viable and visible. Reflecting on these experiences, Mr. C stated, “I’ve grown more than I ever have, but the system can still be a barrier, and trust isn’t always there at all levels.”

Similar comments appeared throughout the data, with participants describing the interaction between leadership supports and organizational conditions. References to culture, support systems, and leadership expectations were identified during the coding process and emerged as recurring topics within discussions related to leadership experiences and retention considerations. These factors were frequently discussed

alongside leadership development and executive coaching experiences across multiple data sources.

Thematic Matrix

Participants described a variety of factors that influenced their decisions to remain in or leave leadership positions. Discussions related to retention frequently included references to organizational support, leadership development opportunities, executive coaching experiences, and workplace culture. Across interviews and archival data, participants often connected access to support systems with their ability to navigate leadership challenges and sustain long-term commitment to their roles. In contrast, participants who described limited support frequently discussed challenges associated with workload demands, professional isolation, and uncertainty regarding their future in leadership. One senior administrator reflected on the role of support in her decision to remain in leadership after a particularly difficult situation, stating, “The coaching gave me a place to process difficult situations and understand how I am showing up as a leader in these situations. I don’t know what I would have done without this guidance.” Similarly, another participant noted, “When you feel supported, you can manage the challenges. When you feel like you're carrying everything alone, leaving starts to feel like an option.” These participant responses reflected recurring discussions regarding the relationship between support structures and leadership retention.

Table 11 presents the thematic matrix for Research Question 3 and summarizes the major themes that emerged regarding leadership retention patterns. Specifically, the table identifies the themes of Access to Support = Retention, Lack of Support = Attrition,

and Culture Matters, along with descriptions of each theme and the data sources from which they emerged. The matrix illustrates how participants described the relationship between support structures and retention decisions, as well as the role organizational culture played in shaping leadership experiences. The table also identifies the sources that contributed to each theme, including interviews, archival data, and triangulated findings across all data sources. This thematic matrix provides a concise summary of the retention-related patterns identified during the analysis process and demonstrates the consistency of these themes across multiple sources of evidence.

Table 11*RQ3 Thematic Matrix: Retention Patterns*

Theme	Description	Data Sources
Access to Support = Retention	Leaders who receive sustained support are more likely to remain in leadership roles.	Archival Data, Interviews
Lack of Support = Attrition	Leaders who experience limited or no support are more likely to consider leaving their positions.	Interviews
Culture Matters	Organizational culture and district priorities significantly influence leadership retention decisions.	All Sources

Note. This thematic matrix summarizes the major themes that emerged in response to Research Question 3 regarding leadership retention patterns. Themes were identified through qualitative coding and analysis of archival data, interview transcripts, and additional supporting data sources. Triangulation across multiple sources strengthened the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings and provided a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing leader retention.

Participants frequently described the availability of leadership support structures as influencing their experiences in leadership roles over time. Discussions related to retention often extended beyond decisions to stay or leave and included reflections on longevity, sustainability, and the ability to remain effective in leadership positions.

Participants who engaged in both leadership development and executive coaching commonly described having ongoing opportunities for reflection, problem-solving, and professional growth. In contrast, participants who reported limited or no structured support frequently discussed challenges associated with managing leadership responsibilities in isolation. One participant reflected, “The coaching gave me the space to think through difficult situations before they became overwhelming, or least force reflection afterward.” Another elementary principal stated, “There were times when I considered stepping away, or returning to teaching, but having someone to help me better understand my strengths as a leader along with my areas for growth made a difference in whether I stayed or left.” These responses emerged across interviews and reflected participants’ descriptions of how support structures influenced their leadership experiences over time.

Table 12 presents a comparison of average tenure and retention trends based on participants’ access to leadership support structures. The table includes three groups: leaders who participated in both executive coaching and leadership development, leaders who participated in leadership development only, and leaders who reported no structured support. Average tenure is presented in years alongside the corresponding retention trend for each group. Participants who engaged in both coaching and leadership development reported the longest average tenure (7.8 years) and were categorized within the high-retention group. Participants who reported leadership development without coaching demonstrated a moderate retention trend with an average tenure of 5.2 years. Leaders who reported no structured support demonstrated the shortest average tenure (3.1 years)

and were categorized within the low-retention group. The table provides a descriptive comparison of leadership longevity across support categories and illustrates the retention patterns identified during data analysis.

Table 12

Retention Comparison Based on Support Access

Group	Average Tenure	Retention Trend
With Coaching and Development	7.8 years	High Retention
Development Only	5.2 years	Moderate Retention
No Structured Support	3.1 years	Low Retention

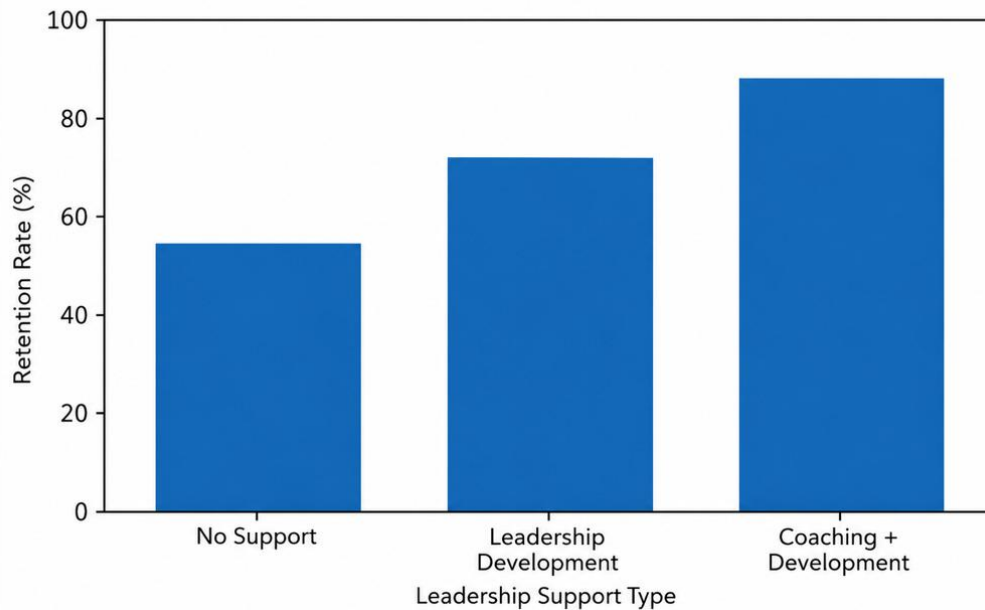
Note. Average tenure represents the mean number of years participants remained in leadership positions based on access to leadership support structures. Findings indicate that leaders who participated in both executive coaching and leadership development demonstrated the longest average tenure and the highest retention trends. Conversely, leaders without structured support exhibited the shortest average tenure and the lowest retention trends, suggesting that access to comprehensive leadership support may positively influence leadership longevity and retention.

Administrator Retention by Level of Support

Participants who reported receiving both coaching and leadership development frequently emphasized the value of having a consistent source of guidance and reflection during challenging leadership situations. Many described how these supports helped them navigate complex responsibilities, maintain perspective, and remain committed to their professional goals. A senior leader in school district shared, “The opportunity to talk through situations with someone who understood leadership helped me think more strategically instead of reacting emotionally.” A elementary school principal reflected, “Coaching gave me the confidence to trust my decisions. It created a space where I could step back, evaluate my options, and move forward with greater clarity.” Across

interviews and focus groups, participants consistently highlighted the importance of supportive structures that encouraged reflection, strengthened leadership capacity, and provided reassurance during periods of uncertainty. These experiences suggest that coaching and leadership development served as important mechanisms for sustaining leaders' effectiveness and resilience in their roles. Another principal stated, "The support system mattered. Having someone to challenge my thinking and help me reflect made it easier to stay focused on the work." These responses emerged across interviews and focus groups and reflected participants' descriptions of the role support structures played in their leadership experiences.

Figure 2 presents a visual comparison of administrator retention rates based on participation in different types of leadership support. The figure illustrates retention percentages for administrators who reported no structured support, those who participated in leadership development only, and those who participated in both executive coaching and leadership development. As shown in the figure, administrators who reported no support demonstrated the lowest retention rate, while administrators who participated in leadership development demonstrated higher retention rates. The highest retention rate was observed among administrators who engaged in both executive coaching and leadership development. The figure provides a visual representation of retention patterns identified throughout the data analysis process and highlights differences in retention outcomes across varying levels of leadership support.

Figure 2*Administrator Retention by Leadership Support*

Note. This table illustrates the progression from open coding to category development and selective coding, resulting in the identification of overarching themes. Code frequency was analyzed across all interview transcripts to strengthen transparency and support the trustworthiness of the findings.

Extended Findings

In addition to the findings reported for each research question, several recurring patterns emerged across interviews, focus groups, surveys, and archival data. These patterns appeared consistently throughout the data collection and coding process and were identified during the analysis of participant responses. Retention patterns reflected differences among leaders based on access to leadership development and executive coaching. Participants with access to both leadership development and executive coaching reported different experiences than participants who described receiving

leadership development alone or no structured support.

Self-Awareness as a Leadership Lever

Self-awareness emerged as a recurring topic throughout participant interviews and focus group discussions. Participants frequently referenced executive coaching when discussing opportunities for reflection, personal growth, and increased understanding of their leadership practices. Descriptions of coaching experiences often included references to examining leadership behaviors, decision-making processes, communication approaches, and responses to professional challenges.

Across participant responses, self-awareness was discussed in relation to confidence, leadership growth, and day-to-day leadership responsibilities. Participants described coaching conversations as opportunities to think through challenges, reflect on professional experiences, and consider alternative approaches to leadership situations. References to self-awareness appeared consistently throughout the interview and focus group data and were identified as a recurring code during analysis.

Isolation in Leadership

Feelings of isolation emerged as a recurring pattern across participant responses. Many administrators described experiences of leading with limited opportunities for collaboration with colleagues who held similar roles. This was especially true among leaders that did not have assistant principals, central office leaders, and certain roles in the intermediate unit leadership. Participants frequently discussed the responsibilities associated with leadership positions and the challenges of navigating those responsibilities independently.

One participant stated, “It’s lonely especially when you are faced with challenges internally with parents and staff.” Another participant shared, “I am alone in my building with no other administrators to be a thought-partner with me at times.” Similar statements appeared throughout the data and reflected participant descriptions of working in leadership positions without regular access to peers for discussion and support.

Participants discussed isolation in various contexts, including decision-making, problem-solving, conflict management, and organizational leadership. References to isolation appeared in both interview and focus group data and were identified as a recurring code during analysis.

Burnout as a Decision Point

Burnout emerged as a recurring topic throughout the data collection process. Participants described experiences involving workload demands, competing priorities, staffing challenges, accountability expectations, and time constraints. School district leadership often included student results and budgetary challenges as well. References to stress and exhaustion appeared frequently in interviews, focus groups, and survey responses.

Several participants discussed periods during which they questioned remaining in leadership positions. These discussions often occurred alongside descriptions of workload pressures and limited support. Participant responses included references to emotional fatigue, professional stress, and challenges associated with balancing leadership responsibilities.

Burnout-related comments were identified across multiple data sources and were

coded throughout the analysis process. As coding progressed, burnout emerged as a recurring pattern connected to participant descriptions of leadership experiences and retention considerations.

Matrix 2: Cross-Case Comparison

Table 13 presents illustrative, representative participant data in one focus group demonstrating the relationship between participation in executive coaching, levels of self-awareness, and retention intent. Participants who engaged in executive coaching reported higher levels of self-awareness and indicated intentions to remain in leadership positions, whereas the participant who did not receive coaching reported lower self-awareness and an intention to leave.

Table 13

Participant Coaching, Self-Awareness, and Retention Intent

Participant	Coaching	Self-Awareness	Retention Intent
A	Yes	High	Stay
B	No	Low	Leave
C	Yes	High	Stay

Triangulation of Data

Table 14 presents the triangulation matrix used to examine the consistency of findings across interviews, focus groups, surveys, and archival data. The matrix demonstrates that several themes emerged repeatedly across multiple sources, providing evidence of convergence and strengthening confidence in the study's findings. Notably, the theme “Retention Linked to Support” was supported across all four data sources,

indicating a particularly strong level of corroboration. Themes related to coaching, general leadership development experiences, and burnout were consistently identified across interviews, focus groups, and survey responses, suggesting that participants shared common experiences regardless of data collection method. The alignment of themes across multiple sources enhances the credibility, dependability, and trustworthiness of the study by demonstrating that the findings were not isolated to a single dataset. The triangulation matrix provides evidence that the themes identified in this study are well-supported and reflect patterns consistently observed throughout the data analysis process.

Table 14*Triangulation Matrix*

Theme	Interviews	Focus Groups	Surveys	Archival Data
Coaching Builds Confidence	✓	✓	✓	—
Leadership Development Inconsistency	✓	✓	✓	—
Retention Linked to Support	✓	✓	✓	✓
Burnout Without Support	✓	✓	✓	—

Note. ✓ indicates theme supported by a data source.

This matrix demonstrates strong convergence across data sources, reinforcing the validity of findings.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal a clear and compelling relationship between leadership supports and administrator retention.

Executive coaching emerged as a critical differentiator, offering personalized, reflective support that enhances leadership capacity. Unlike traditional professional development provided locally in a larger group setting, coaching addresses the individual needs of administrators, making it particularly effective in sustaining leadership over time.

The data also highlights the importance of organizational culture. Districts that prioritize leadership development and provide consistent support systems create environments where administrators are more likely to thrive and remain.

Summary

This chapter presented a comprehensive and methodologically rigorous analysis of the data, utilizing multiple forms of representation including rich narrative descriptions, tables, and coded matrices to enhance both clarity and analytical depth. Through an iterative and systematic coding process, key themes were identified and examined across participants and data sources, allowing for a robust interpretation of administrators' lived experiences. The use of multiple analytic formats not only supported transparency in the presentation of findings but also enabled the clear alignment of emergent themes with the study's guiding research questions.

The integration of multiple data sources including interviews, focus groups, surveys, and archival records strengthened the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings through triangulation. This approach allowed for the identification of both convergent and divergent patterns, offering a nuanced and contextually grounded understanding of how leadership supports influences administrators' experiences and

retention-related decisions. By capturing both individual perspectives and broader organizational trends, the study provides a comprehensive view of the conditions that contribute to leadership sustainability within educational systems.

Chapter 5 examines the findings by examining their implications for educational practice, policy, and future research. Drawing on the themes identified in this analysis, the subsequent chapter offers targeted recommendations for the design and implementation of leadership development and coaching structures that more effectively support administrators. Particular emphasis is placed on creating coherent, sustained, and context-responsive support systems that promote professional growth, job satisfaction, and long-term retention. Chapter 5 considers areas for future inquiry, with the goal of advancing the field's understanding of how to cultivate and sustain effective educational leadership in diverse and evolving contexts.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusions and Recommendations

Educational leadership has become increasingly complex, requiring administrators to navigate instructional leadership, organizational management, accountability demands, funding uncertainty, stakeholder expectations, and the social-emotional dimensions of leading schools and educational organizations. As educational systems continue to experience increasing demands, concerns regarding administrator retention, leadership sustainability, and professional support have emerged as significant issues within the field. The purpose of this qualitative inquiry was to examine administrators' perceptions of general leadership development opportunities, explore the influence of executive coaching on career-related decision-making, and identify retention-related patterns among administrators who participated in leadership development opportunities and executive coaching experiences. The findings presented in Chapter 4 revealed a compelling relationship between leadership supports and administrator retention. Participants consistently described general leadership development opportunities as necessary but insufficient when provided in isolation. In contrast, executive coaching emerged as a highly influential support structure that enhanced leadership confidence, increased self-awareness, strengthened decision-making, and contributed to administrators' decisions to remain in leadership positions. Organizational culture and relational support significantly influenced leadership sustainability and retention outcomes.

This chapter presents conclusions drawn from the findings, discusses implications

for educational practice, examines limitations of the study, offers recommendations for future research, and describes how the findings will be applied within school district and intermediate unit settings. The chapter concludes with a summary of the study and final reflections regarding leadership sustainability in educational organizations.

Conclusions

Research Question 1

How do school and district administrators perceive the effectiveness of general leadership development professional learning opportunities in supporting their professional growth?

The findings suggest that participants perceived general leadership development opportunities as valuable for establishing foundational leadership knowledge; however, these opportunities were often insufficient in preparing administrators for the relational, emotional, and contextual realities of leadership practice. Participants consistently described leadership development experiences as beneficial in providing theoretical frameworks, leadership language, and conceptual understanding, yet many indicated that such experiences lacked practical application and personalization. Participants also discussed a disconnect between formal leadership training and the day-to-day complexities of educational leadership, particularly in relation to conflict management, staff supervision, communication, and organizational, cultural change. These conclusions are strongly supported by the study findings, which identified themes related to foundational but insufficient learning experiences, the gap between theory and practice, and inconsistent implementation of leadership development programs.

The findings indicate that leadership development should move beyond one-size-fits-all models and incorporate sustained, job-embedded, and context-specific learning opportunities. Professional learning experiences that allow administrators to apply concepts to authentic leadership challenges appear to have greater perceived value and stronger potential for influencing leadership effectiveness. These findings align with contemporary leadership development literature emphasizing experiential learning, reflective practice, and personalized professional growth.

Research Question 2

What are administrators' experiences with executive coaching, and how do these experiences influence their leadership effectiveness and career decisions?

Executive coaching emerged as a transformative leadership support that significantly influenced participants' leadership effectiveness and career trajectories. Participants consistently described coaching as providing dedicated opportunities for reflection, individualized support, increased self-awareness, and enhanced confidence. Unlike traditional professional development, executive coaching addressed the unique circumstances and contextual challenges faced by individual leaders.

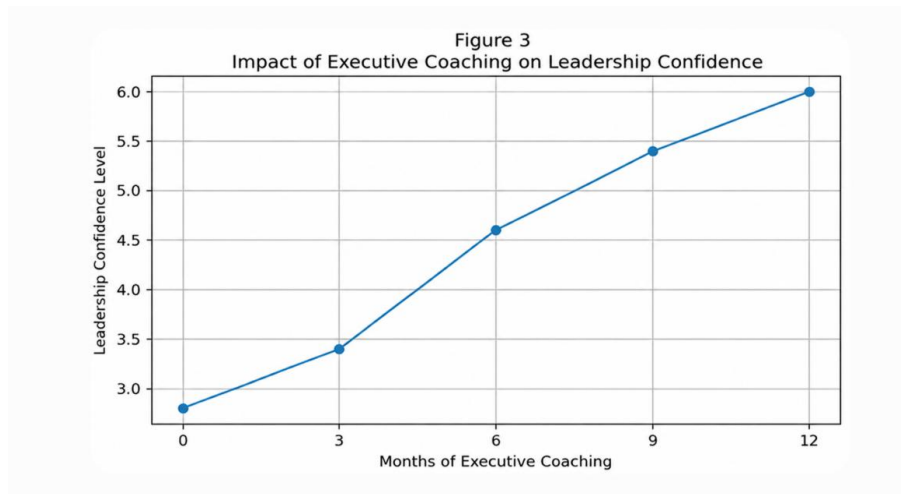
Participants reported that coaching strengthened decision-making, improved communication, increased intentionality, and supported the development of leadership identity. Many participants also described coaching as a safe space for processing challenges, reflecting on leadership behaviors, and exploring alternative approaches to complex situations.

The findings further suggest that executive coaching served not only as a

professional growth mechanism but also as a protective factor against leadership isolation and burnout. Several participants explicitly linked coaching experiences to their decisions to continue to stay in a leadership position. These conclusions are strongly supported by the triangulated findings across interviews, focus groups, surveys, and archival data.

Conceptual Representation of Leadership Confidence During Executive Coaching

Figure 3 provides a conceptual illustration of participants' descriptions of leadership confidence during engagement in executive coaching. Participants frequently reported increased confidence, self-awareness, improved decision-making, and greater resilience as coaching continued over time. Some participants described coaching as a reflective process that supported leadership growth and enhanced their ability to navigate complex leadership responsibilities while understanding themselves as leaders in those moments. The figure suggests that sustained coaching experiences, rather than isolated interactions, contribute most significantly to leadership confidence development. Participants often indicated that meaningful changes occurred after extended periods of reflection and practice, suggesting that coaching should be conceptualized as an ongoing developmental process rather than a short-term intervention.

Figure 3

Note. The figure presents a conceptual representation of participant-reported leadership confidence over time during engagement in executive coaching. The trend illustrates increasing confidence levels, with notable growth occurring after approximately six months of sustained coaching participation. This figure is intended to visually represent patterns described by participants and is not based on actual numerical measurements collected during the study.

Research Question 3

What retention-related patterns emerge when comparing administrators who have participated in intentional leadership development opportunities and coaching opportunities with those who have not?

The findings indicate that administrators who participated in both executive coaching and leadership development reported the highest levels of retention, longest average tenure, and strongest intentions to remain in leadership positions. Participants

who reported no structured leadership support demonstrated the lowest retention rates and shortest average tenure.

These findings suggest that executive coaching serves as a significant contributor to leadership sustainability; however, retention decisions were not influenced by coaching alone. Organizational culture, relational support, workload expectations, trust in organizational leadership, and access to collaborative support systems also emerged as important factors influencing administrators' decisions to remain in leadership roles.

The study further concluded that organizational conditions can either amplify or diminish the effectiveness of leadership supports. Even participants who reported highly positive coaching experiences described organizational barriers, workload demands, and cultural challenges as factors affecting their leadership experiences. As a result, leadership retention should be understood as a multidimensional phenomenon influenced by both individual and organizational factors.

The findings of this study have significant implications for educational organizations, particularly school districts and intermediate units seeking to strengthen leadership capacity and improve administrator retention. The findings reveal a clear and compelling relationship between leadership supports and administrator retention, suggesting that leadership sustainability is not solely dependent on individual leader characteristics, but also on the quality and coherence of the support systems provided by organizations. Although whole group, general leadership development opportunities provide foundational knowledge and skills, their effectiveness appears to be largely

dependent on their relevance, consistency, and applicability to authentic leadership challenges as well as providing pathways for real-world leadership behavioral awareness and application. Participants consistently emphasized that leadership development experiences were most valuable when they extended beyond traditional professional learning and included personalized, relational, and sustained forms of support.

The findings suggest that educational organizations should develop comprehensive leadership support systems that intentionally integrate leadership development, executive coaching, mentoring, and peer networking. Rather than viewing professional learning and coaching as separate or isolated initiatives, districts and intermediate units should design coherent leadership pathways that provide ongoing support across all stages of a leader's career. Participants frequently described the importance of sustained support in helping them navigate the increasingly complex demands of leadership. One high school principal (Dr. J) stated, “The executive coaching was transformative for me. It provided me with a much broader view of leadership and how to develop specific skills and strategies that weren't necessarily "principal" related but they were very much leadership related. The coach posed reflective questions that I often took back to my school team and this helped us gain insight into some of our practices that needed to be adjusted.”

These experiences reinforce the importance of creating leadership systems that address not only technical skill development, but also the relational and reflective dimensions of leadership practice. The findings further indicate that districts and intermediate units should consider expanding access to executive coaching for both

aspiring and experienced administrators. Executive coaching emerged as one of the most influential forms of support described by participants and was consistently associated with increased leadership confidence, enhanced decision-making, greater self-awareness, and improved resilience. Participants frequently described coaching as a transformative experience that enabled them to navigate complex organizational environments with greater clarity and effectiveness. A Senior leader in a school district stated, “The executive coaching experience helped me uncover both my leadership strengths and the blind spots that were unintentionally hindering my effectiveness. It was a true awakening, shifting my understanding of how I believed I was being perceived as a leader to a deeper self-awareness of the impact I actually have on others.”

Another Central Office participant stated, “Coaching has reinforced that effective leadership support requires adaptability, patience, and intentionality. I am learning, continuously, to meet each leader where they are and provide the level of support that helps them grow.” These findings suggest that providing equitable access to coaching opportunities may strengthen leadership effectiveness while also reducing administrator attrition.

Findings from participant interviews revealed that many administrators experienced a pervasive sense of leadership isolation especially if they were the only administrator in the building or department. Participants repeatedly discussed the challenges associated with making difficult decisions, managing competing priorities, leading up and/or down across the organization, and carrying significant responsibilities with limited opportunities for collegial support. As a result, districts and intermediate

units should intentionally establish job-alike networking opportunities, leadership councils, and collaborative communities of practice that provide sustained opportunities for reflection, problem-solving, and peer learning. Job-alike networks, in particular, create valuable spaces for administrators serving in similar roles to engage in authentic dialogue, share experiences, exchange effective practices, and address common challenges within a supportive professional environment. Such structures foster meaningful professional relationships and enable leaders to develop collective solutions to complex issues while reducing feelings of professional isolation. These findings underscore the critical role that relational supports and intentional networking opportunities play in strengthening leadership efficacy, promoting professional growth, and supporting long-term leadership sustainability. The findings also underscore the importance of personalized leadership development. Participants frequently described traditional professional development experiences as valuable but insufficient when disconnected from the realities of their specific leadership contexts. Leadership development programs that incorporated authentic problem-solving, reflective practice, and individualized application were viewed as significantly more meaningful and impactful. Participants emphasized that leadership development opportunities should be differentiated based on role, experience level, and organizational context. One administrator remarked, "The most meaningful learning occurred when I could immediately apply it to a challenge I was facing in my school. If that wasn't present in the training or conference, I struggled to figure it out or prioritize." A Senior leader stated, "If it is not tailored to me, it doesn't resonate or impact as much."

These findings suggest that leadership development initiatives should move beyond one-size-fits-all approaches and instead provide differentiated learning experiences aligned to individual professional goals and organizational needs.

The findings from this study have direct implications for leadership support practices within intermediate unit settings. Leadership development experiences and conferences should increasingly incorporate leadership behaviors and skills alongside traditional professional learning opportunities. Leadership networks should continue to expand in order to provide sustained opportunities for collaboration, reflection, and peer learning among administrators across diverse contexts. Executive coaching services should also be intentionally embedded within leadership development pathways for aspiring, emerging, and experienced leaders. Such pathways have the potential to create a more comprehensive and sustainable approach to leadership development by supporting leaders throughout their professional journeys rather than at isolated points in time.

The study further supports the development of comprehensive leadership sustainability frameworks that address not only skill acquisition, but also self-awareness, well-being, relational support, and leadership identity development. Executive coaching emerged as a significant factor in sustaining leadership effectiveness, with participants consistently highlighting its influence on self-awareness, decision-making, and increased behavioral skills relative to needs within complex organizational environments. Leadership development opportunities were also found to contribute to professional growth; however, their impact was often amplified when paired with individualized and relational supports such as coaching and mentoring. These findings suggest that while

structured professional learning provides important foundational knowledge and skill development, personalized support mechanisms are essential for translating that learning into sustained leadership practice.

The experiences of participants also illustrate the importance of organizational context in shaping retention outcomes. Dr. H stated, “I have improved my ability to decipher between what is "leading" and what is "managing" and how to balance those two things better. I feel more confident in building leadership capacity within others, and this has greatly improved the climate and culture.” This experience demonstrated that even robust leadership supports may be insufficient in environments characterized by limited structural alignment, inadequate support systems, or organizational instability. Her experiences reinforce the notion that leadership development initiatives do not operate independently of organizational conditions. Instead, the effectiveness of leadership supports is mediated by factors such as organizational culture, trust, communication, and systemic coherence. Consequently, educational organizations seeking to improve retention should examine not only the quality of leadership development opportunities provided, but also the broader organizational conditions in which leaders work.

The findings additionally have important fiscal implications for educational organizations. Implementing comprehensive leadership support systems requires financial investment. Executive coaching programs, facilitator preparation, leadership networks, and professional learning opportunities involve costs associated with personnel, program design, materials, and implementation. Participants' experiences

suggest that these investments may yield substantial long-term benefits. Administrator turnover often results in significant direct and indirect costs related to recruitment, hiring, onboarding, lost productivity, and organizational disruption. By improving leadership effectiveness and increasing retention, educational organizations may realize long-term financial savings while simultaneously strengthening organizational capacity. Districts and intermediate units may consider leveraging existing professional learning funds, grant opportunities, regional partnerships, and consortium models to expand access to leadership supports while maximizing available resources.

Overall, the findings provide compelling evidence that leadership development and executive coaching play critical roles in supporting administrator retention and professional fulfillment. Educational organizations that intentionally invest in comprehensive, relational, and sustained leadership support systems are more likely to develop resilient leaders, strengthen organizational capacity, and create conditions that promote long-term leadership sustainability.

Limitations

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings of this study. Although these limitations do not diminish the value of the findings, they should be acknowledged when considering the transferability and applicability of the results. Recognizing these limitations provides important context for understanding the scope of the study and offers direction for future research.

The study employed a qualitative research design with a relatively small sample size. This methodological approach was intentionally selected to gain an in-depth

understanding of participants' lived experiences related to leadership development, executive coaching, and retention. The design allowed participants to provide rich, detailed descriptions of their experiences and perceptions, thereby generating nuanced insights that may not have emerged through quantitative methods alone. However, because qualitative research prioritizes depth over breadth, the findings are not intended to be generalized to all educational leaders or educational settings. Instead, the findings should be viewed as context-specific and reflective of the experiences of the participants who engaged in the study. While readers may identify similarities between the study context and their own professional environments, caution should be exercised when applying the findings broadly across diverse educational systems and contexts.

Another limitation involves the reliance on self-reported data. Participant responses were derived primarily from interviews and focus group discussions, requiring individuals to reflect upon and describe their personal experiences and perceptions. Self-report data are inherently subjective and may be influenced by several factors. Participants may have experienced recall bias, particularly when discussing events or experiences that occurred in the past. Additionally, social desirability bias may have influenced participants to present themselves, their organizations, or their experiences in a more favorable manner. Participants' current professional circumstances, including recent experiences, organizational changes, or job satisfaction levels, may have also shaped their responses. Although efforts were made to enhance credibility through triangulation and member checking, the potential influence of these factors cannot be entirely eliminated.

The geographic scope of the study also presents a limitation. Participants were drawn from a limited geographic region, which may restrict the transferability of the findings to educational contexts outside of the study setting. Educational systems vary considerably across regions with respect to organizational structures, leadership expectations, available resources, community demographics, and policy environments. As a result, administrators working in different geographic areas or educational contexts may encounter challenges and experiences that differ from those described by participants in this study. While the findings offer valuable insights into leadership development and executive coaching within the study context, additional research conducted across diverse regions and educational settings would strengthen understanding of the extent to which these findings are applicable in other contexts.

An additional limitation pertains to the measurement of retention outcomes. Retention-related findings were based primarily on participant perceptions, interview responses, and available archival evidence rather than longitudinal tracking of actual retention behaviors over an extended period. Participants described how leadership development and executive coaching influenced their intentions to remain in leadership roles or continue within their organizations; however, intentions do not always translate into actual career decisions. Numerous external factors, including personal circumstances, family considerations, career advancement opportunities, organizational changes, and labor market conditions, may influence retention outcomes over time. Consequently, the findings related to retention should be interpreted as reflective of participants' perceptions and experiences rather than definitive evidence of long-term

retention behavior.

Variability in organizational contexts across participants represents another important limitation. Participants represented a range of leadership roles and worked within different educational organizations, each characterized by unique cultures, leadership structures, support systems, and operational conditions. These contextual differences may have influenced participants' experiences with leadership development and executive coaching. Organizational factors such as leadership climate, access to professional learning opportunities, available resources, and levels of organizational trust may have contributed to participants' perceptions and experiences. As a result, it is difficult to isolate the specific effects of executive coaching independent of other organizational variables. The complex and interconnected nature of educational organizations suggests that leadership development experiences are influenced by multiple contextual factors operating simultaneously. Future research designed to control for or more closely examine these organizational variables may provide additional insight into the specific contributions of executive coaching to leadership effectiveness and retention.

Despite these limitations, the study contributes meaningful insights into the experiences of educational leaders and advances understanding of the role that leadership development and executive coaching may play in supporting leadership effectiveness and retention. The findings provide a foundation for continued investigation and offer practical implications for educational organizations seeking to strengthen leadership capacity and sustainability.

Recommendations for Future Research

Several recommendations for future research emerged from the findings of this study. One important area for future investigation involves conducting longitudinal studies to examine the long-term influence of executive coaching on administrator retention. While the current study identified positive perceptions regarding the value of leadership development and executive coaching, the cross-sectional nature of the research limited the ability to determine whether these benefits persist over time. Longitudinal research following educational leaders across multiple years would provide a deeper understanding of how executive coaching influences career trajectories, leadership longevity, and retention decisions throughout different stages of a leader's professional journey. Such studies could also identify whether the effects of coaching diminish, remain stable or strengthen as leaders gain additional experience and assume increasingly complex responsibilities.

Future research should also investigate the relationship between executive coaching and student outcomes. Although this study focused primarily on leadership effectiveness and retention, educational leadership ultimately exists to improve teaching, learning, and student success. Researchers could explore whether leaders who participate in executive coaching demonstrate improvements in school climate, instructional practices, teacher effectiveness, student achievement, or other student-centered indicators. Examining these relationships would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how investments in leadership development indirectly influence organizational performance and student success.

Additional research is warranted to examine differences in coaching effectiveness across leadership roles, including principals, assistant principals, central office administrators, and intermediate unit leaders. The responsibilities, challenges, and organizational contexts associated with these positions vary considerably, suggesting that leaders may experience coaching differently depending on their role. Comparative studies could identify whether specific coaching approaches are more effective for certain leadership positions and determine how coaching can be differentiated to address the unique needs of leaders at various organizational levels. Such findings would provide valuable guidance for organizations seeking to tailor leadership development initiatives to maximize impact.

The relationship between leadership self-awareness and organizational effectiveness also merits further investigation. Self-awareness emerged as an important element of leadership development within this study, particularly as participants described increased reflection, improved decision-making, and enhanced interpersonal relationships resulting from coaching experiences. Future research should examine how leadership self-awareness influences organizational outcomes such as staff engagement, organizational culture, trust, communication, and overall effectiveness. Exploring these relationships may provide additional evidence regarding the mechanisms through which executive coaching contributes to organizational improvement.

Researchers should also investigate the cost-benefit relationship associated with implementing executive coaching programs. Although participants in this study overwhelmingly perceived coaching as valuable, educational organizations frequently

operate under significant fiscal constraints and must carefully consider resource allocation decisions. Future studies examining the financial investment required to implement coaching programs relative to outcomes such as improved retention, reduced turnover costs, increased leader effectiveness, and enhanced organizational performance would provide important information for decision-makers. Such research could assist educational leaders and governing bodies in determining the return on investment associated with executive coaching initiatives.

Further research should explore the experiences of leaders from historically underrepresented populations. Educational leadership continues to face challenges related to diversity, equity, and representation. Leaders from historically underrepresented backgrounds may encounter unique barriers, experiences, and support needs that influence both their leadership development and retention. Examining the experiences of these leaders within coaching relationships could provide important insights into how executive coaching may serve as a mechanism for promoting equity, fostering inclusion, and supporting leadership advancement among diverse populations.

Comparative studies examining retention outcomes across multiple geographic regions and educational contexts are also recommended. This study was conducted within a specific educational context, which may limit the transferability of findings. Future research should investigate whether similar relationships among leadership development, executive coaching, and retention exist across rural, suburban, and urban settings, as well as across different states, regions, or educational systems. Such research would enhance the generalizability of findings and contribute to a broader understanding of how

contextual factors influence leadership sustainability.

An additional avenue for future inquiry involves exploring the role of organizational trust in mediating the relationship between coaching and retention. Organizational trust has been consistently linked to leadership effectiveness, job satisfaction, and employee commitment. Participants in this study frequently referenced the importance of supportive relationships, psychological safety, and collaborative cultures in influencing their professional experiences and career decisions. Future studies could examine whether executive coaching strengthens organizational trust and whether increased trust serves as a mediating factor influencing retention outcomes. Understanding these relationships may further clarify the pathways through which leadership development initiatives contribute to organizational sustainability.

Collectively, these areas warrant additional investigation and have the potential to generate new lines of inquiry related to leadership development, organizational effectiveness, and leadership sustainability. Continued research in these areas will contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how executive coaching and leadership development initiatives can support educational leaders, strengthen organizations, and ultimately improve outcomes for schools and the communities they serve.

Summary

This study examined administrators' perceptions of leadership development, executive coaching, and leadership retention. The findings demonstrated that leadership development provides important foundational knowledge but is often insufficient when delivered without personalization, sustained support, and opportunities for authentic

application. Executive coaching emerged as a transformative leadership support that enhances self-awareness, leadership effectiveness, confidence, and retention intentions. Organizational culture, relational support, and access to comprehensive support systems also significantly influenced leadership sustainability.

Together, the findings suggest that educational organizations seeking to strengthen leadership effectiveness and improve administrator retention should move beyond traditional professional development models and adopt comprehensive systems of leadership support. Such systems should intentionally integrate executive coaching, collaborative networks, reflective practice, and personalized professional learning opportunities.

As educational leadership continues to evolve, organizations must recognize that sustaining leaders requires more than developing technical competencies. Sustaining leadership requires investing in people, relationships, reflection, and the conditions that enable leaders to thrive over time.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

IRB Approval Letter



Institutional Review Board
724-938-4178
irb@pennwest.edu

Pennsylvania Western University
Institutional Review Board
250 University Ave, California, PA 15419
IRB@pennwest.edu

October 24, 2025

Maria Hoover, Ed.D. Candidate, P.I.
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Mary Wolf
Capstone Title: *The Impact of Leadership Development and Executive Coaching on Administrator Retention*
Protocol Tracking Number: PWIRB25036MH-EP
Approved Study Period: October 25, 2025 to October 25, 2026

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Pennsylvania Western University, I am pleased to inform you that the above-referenced protocol has been *approved* under Expedited Review in accordance with 45 CFR 46.110, Categories 6 and 7.

As an expedited study, you are required at the conclusion of your data collection to submit a Closure Report briefly documenting that all research activities have ended, that data collection/analysis with identifiers is complete, that no unanticipated risks occurred (or describing any that did), and that data storage and destruction follow your approved protocol. Should any unanticipated risk occur, please promptly notify the IRB.

Researchers are responsible for conducting research in accordance with the ethical principles outlined in the Belmont Report, all applicable federal and state regulations, and PennWest policies. The IRB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under IRB00003711 and operates under Federal-Wide Assurance FWA00032724 and IORG0003094.

Should you require verification of your IRB approval for university purposes, grant agencies, or external partners, provide them with this document. Please retain this approval letter for your records. If you have any questions, please contact us at the email above.

Sincerely,
Nikolas C. Roberts, Ph.D.
Director, Institutional Review Board
Pennsylvania Western University

Appendix B**Administrator Perceptions of Leadership Development: Interview Guide****Interview Guide – Leadership Development (RQ1)****Purpose**

To explore principal and central office administrator perceptions and experiences related to leadership development.

Dear Participant,

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey as I know your schedule is busy. This should take you no longer than 20 minutes to complete and at the end of this document there is a google link for participation. You *do not* need to fill out both this hard copy and the link. This survey is designed to explore the perceptions and experiences of principals and central office administrators regarding leadership development in educational settings.

Your responses will contribute valuable insights into how leadership opportunities are experienced and how they influence professional growth and retention in leadership roles. This survey consists of open-ended questions and should take approximately 15–20 minutes to complete.

All responses will remain confidential and will be used solely for research purposes.

Each question below also appears in the google form. If you choose to complete this via hard copy, please scan and return to:

mh172039@pennwest.edu

Thank you for you time and all you do!

Maria Hoover

Supervisor for STEM and Educational Leadership (CCIU)

Doctoral Candidate, Pennsylvania West University

Section: Open-Ended Questions

Please respond thoughtfully to the following questions:

1. Please describe your overall experience with leadership opportunities in your current role.

(You may reflect on both formal and informal opportunities.)

2. Which leadership development opportunities have been most impactful in shaping your professional growth?

(Please provide specific examples if possible.)

3. How do you personally define effective leadership within the context of your current educational environment?

(Consider your values, priorities, and key leadership behaviors.)

4. What challenges have you encountered in accessing or benefiting from leadership development opportunities?

(This may include systemic, organizational, or personal challenges.)

5. In what ways has participation in leadership development influenced your approach to leading your school or department?

(Please share any changes in mindset, strategies, or practices.)

6. How have your experiences with leadership development affected your desire to remain in a leadership position?

(You may discuss motivations, future aspirations, or retention considerations.)

Thank you!

Your time and thoughtful responses are highly valued and will help inform future leadership development initiatives in education.

You may also complete this survey online by visiting:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSc_kHYXWKvouY6wrg3gNAruhKuN00vRd9NVu9n-5oXXHit0sg/viewform?usp=sharing&oid=116424831533332854477

Appendix C

Informed Consent for Participation in Leadership Development Interview Study

Informed Consent Form: Principal and Central Office Leadership Development Interview

Maria Hoover, Doctoral Candidate
Pennsylvania West University

Purpose of the Study

You are invited to participate in a research study exploring perspectives on leadership development. The goal is to better understand individual experiences and insights related to leadership growth and development among principals and central office administrators.

Interview Format

If you choose to participate, you will take part in a semi-structured interview lasting approximately 30 to 45 minutes. The interview may be conducted in person or via a virtual platform (e.g., Zoom or Microsoft Teams), based on your preference. There is also a link on the survey to complete this electronically if you prefer. The form should take about 20 minutes to complete.

Confidentiality and Data Protection

- All information shared during the interview will be kept strictly confidential.
- Your identity will be anonymized in all reports and publications.
- Interview data will be stored securely in password-protected files, accessible only to the research team.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation is **completely voluntary**. You may:

- Decline to answer any question.
- Withdraw from the interview at any point without explanation or penalty.

Contact Information

If you have questions about this research or your rights as a participant, please contact:

Maria Hoover

mariathoover@pennwest.edu

717-468-4219

Consent Statement

By signing below, I acknowledge that I have read and understood the information provided above. I voluntarily agree to participate in the *Leadership Development Interview Study* and understand that I may withdraw at any time without penalty.

Participant Name (Print): _____

Participant Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Researcher Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Digital Form available. Please follow this link: <https://forms.gle/ceubs7VKcs1yFkn56>

Appendix D**Administrator Reflections on Executive Coaching, Interview Guide**

Interview Guide: Principal and Central Office Leaders Who Have Received Executive Coaching (RQ2)

Purpose

The purpose of this interview is to gain in-depth insight into the personal and professional experiences of principals and central office leaders who have received executive leadership coaching. Your reflections will contribute to a better understanding of the role coaching plays in leadership development, retention, and organizational growth.

Section 1: Executive Coaching – Open-Ended Questions

1. How were you introduced to executive coaching?

2. Can you describe your coaching experience and what stood out to you?

3. How has coaching influenced your leadership confidence or performance?

4. What specific outcomes or changes have you noticed since participating in coaching?

5. Were there any aspects of the coaching process that were particularly helpful or unhelpful?

6. How has executive leadership coaching supported your commitment to staying in a leadership role?

7. What have you learned about yourself as a result of receiving executive coaching?

Section 2: Demographic Questions

1. Can you describe your current role and key responsibilities within your school district?

2. How long have you been serving in an administrative capacity?

3. Does your position follow a 10-month or 12-month contract?

How does that impact your work-life balance or access to professional development?

Section 3: Organizational Questions

4. In what ways does your role within the district influence the types of leadership development opportunities available to you?

5. How do you feel your employment status (e.g., contract length or administrative level) affects your ability to participate in leadership development?

6. How has your experience in your current position shaped your interest in staying or seeking new opportunities within the organization?

7. What evidence exists that your school district/organization is invested in leadership development of administrators?

Section 4: Leadership Development Questions

8. Which types of leadership development activities have been most meaningful to your growth (e.g., workshops, coaching, mentorship), and why?

9. How do you prefer to learn or develop professionally (through hands-on practice, online modules, collaborative learning, or another method)?

10. If you've received executive coaching, how has it impacted your leadership effectiveness and decision-making?
(Can you provide 1–2 examples?)

11. How would you assess the overall effectiveness of the leadership development opportunities you've experienced?
Can you share any specific leadership insights, practices, or actionable changes that resulted from them?
Which specific leadership skills or topics do you believe need more attention in development programs?

12. What kinds of training, resources, or support would better support your continued leadership growth?

13. How do leadership development opportunities influence your decision to remain in or leave your current role?

Appendix E

Purpose and Scope of the Study: Informed Consent for Executive Coaching Participant Interview

You are invited to participate in an interview as part of an executive coaching study. The purpose of this research is to gain insight into the experiences and outcomes of executive coaching. Your participation will help us understand how executive leadership coaching impacts leadership development and organizational effectiveness.

Duration and Format of the Interview

The interview is expected to last approximately 45 minutes. It will be conducted virtually via Zoom, Teams, or in person, based on your preference. The session will involve open-ended questions about your coaching experience.

Voluntary Participation and Confidentiality Protections

Participation in this interview is entirely voluntary. You may skip any question without penalty. All the information you provide will be kept confidential. Your identity will not be disclosed in any reports or publications resulting from this study, unless you give explicit written permission.

Data Usage and Storage

Information collected during the interview will be used only for research and analysis purposes. Audio recordings, transcripts, and notes will be securely stored and accessible only to the research team. All data will be anonymized or de-identified in reports.

Right to Withdraw Without Penalty

You may withdraw from the interview at any time without penalty. If you request it, any data collected up to that point will be destroyed.

Researcher Contact Information

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the study, please contact:

Maria Hoover

Doctoral Candidate, Pennsylvania West University

mariathoover@gmail.com
717-468-4219

Participant Statement

By signing below, I confirm that I have read and understood the information above. I voluntarily agree to participate in this interview.

Participant Name (print): _____

Participant Signature: _____

Date: _____

Link to Google Form: <https://forms.gle/m8tkyEbLteh8koWg9>

Appendix F

Senior Leadership Survey Questions: Senior Leadership Interview Handout

Purpose of the Survey

This survey is designed to gather insights into leadership experiences and the organizational culture surrounding leadership development. The focus is on perspectives and experiences rather than job titles, fostering open and reflective responses.

Section 1: Leadership Journey and Personal Experience

Purpose:

To understand your leadership path and the experiences that have most influenced your growth as a school or district leader.

1. Can you share a little about your leadership journey and what experiences have shaped you most as a school or district leader?

Section 2: Organizational Culture Specific to Leadership Development

Purpose:

To explore how the district's culture supports or hinders leadership development, and how leadership is valued and communicated throughout the organization.

2. How would you describe your district's overall approach to leadership development for administrators?

3. In what ways does your organization communicate the value or priority of developing its school and district leaders?

Section 3: Professional Learning Opportunities**Purpose:**

To explore the types and accessibility of leadership-related professional development experiences offered to district and school leaders.

4. What kinds of professional learning opportunities have been most impactful for your growth as a leader?

5. How accessible and relevant are the leadership development programs offered by your district?

Section 4: Personal Learning Support Systems in Place**Purpose:**

To identify the formal and informal support systems (such as mentorship, coaching, and peer networks) that help leaders grow and succeed in their roles.

6. What support systems (mentors, peer networks, coaching) do you rely on to grow as a leader?

7. How has executive leadership coaching, if applicable, played a role in your leadership journey?

8. If you have not had executive leadership coaching, how have your leadership development opportunities played a role in your leadership journey?

Section 5: The Impact of Professional Growth Opportunities on Retention Decisions

Purpose:

To explore the relationship between leadership development opportunities and decisions to remain in or leave the district or current leadership role.

9. How have leadership development opportunities influenced your decision to remain in your current role or explore other opportunities?

10. Would you be more or less likely to stay in your district if these growth opportunities were reduced or eliminated? Why? In comparison, would you be more or less likely to stay in your district if your growth opportunities were increased or further supported? Why?

Thank You

Your responses are valuable and will help guide future decisions around leadership development and support systems for school and district leaders.

Link to Google Form: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSe-sspdAvGt_Bt-BrbcHZlZkSfLxdG8nRnFkY1yqStQvC2I2g/viewform

Appendix G

Senior Level Leaders' Perspectives on Leadership Development Informed Consent Form

Researcher: Maria Hoover, Doctoral Candidate

Institution: Pennsylvania West University

Introduction and Purpose of the Study

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted as part of a doctoral dissertation at Pennsylvania West University. This study focuses on understanding the lived experiences and perspectives of senior school and district leaders.

The purpose of the study is to explore:

- How leadership development is supported through organizational culture
- The impact of professional learning opportunities
- The role of informal support systems (e.g., mentoring, coaching, peer networks)
- How these experiences influence leadership growth and decisions to remain in or leave a role or district

This research seeks to create a reflective and comfortable space where your leadership journey and insights are valued beyond your job title.

Participation Overview

Voluntary Participation

Your participation is entirely voluntary. You may choose to withdraw from the study at any point without any negative consequences or impact on your professional standing.

Confidentiality

All responses will remain confidential. No personally identifiable information will be included in any published materials. Data will be securely stored and only accessible to the researcher.

Time Commitment

Participation includes a one-time interview lasting approximately 40-50 minutes. You may also be asked to review and clarify your responses as needed.

Potential Risks and Benefits

There are no known risks associated with participation in this study. Benefits include the opportunity to reflect on your leadership journey and contribute to a broader understanding of effective leadership development.

Consent and Acknowledgment

Please complete the following information to indicate your informed consent to participate in this study.

Full Name (Printed):

Job Title:

District/Organization:

Email Address:

Phone Number (optional):

I have read and understand the information provided in this consent form. I voluntarily agree to participate in the study and understand that I may withdraw at any time without penalty.

Signature:

Date: **Researcher Contact Information:**

Maria Hoover, Doctoral Candidate

Pennsylvania West University

Email: mh172039@pennwest.edu

717-468-4219

Link to the consent form: <https://forms.gle/Mxk2ApU38imCotdz8>